

# Snippets

Edition 13



## From the MD

- The charity has seen many fundamental changes over the last 12 months, mainly driven by sector constraints, the Regulator of Social Housing and our newly appointed board members.
- We continue to work closely with the Regulator and remain committed as we begin to quantify our position within the sector and consolidate for our future to ensure we meet all obligations.
- Our newly appointed board members have brought well needed skills and experience to the charity which in turn has strengthened our governance position, though we still have some way to go.
- Unfortunately, progress in some key areas has been delayed due to the unprecedented outbreak of COVID-19. As of 23rd March 2020, the charity made the decision for all employees to work remotely.
- We are still operating with reduced services. We have been able to still carry out emergency repairs and compliance obligations with the assistance and collaborative working relationships of our key stakeholders and support providers; in turn maintaining the health and safety of our tenants.
- On behalf of the charity I would like to express our gratitude to the team and key workers that have sustained the delivery of care and supervision for our tenants across the UK in these unprecedented times.

*Shelley Hobbs  
Managing Director*

## Our Website Has a Fresh New Look.

With you in mind, we have redesigned our website and made a few changes. You can now report a repair directly through our website, leave feedback and suggestions, get news updates and more! These changes should make it more efficient and easier to navigate around.

Let us know what you think at [www.bestha.co.uk](http://www.bestha.co.uk)



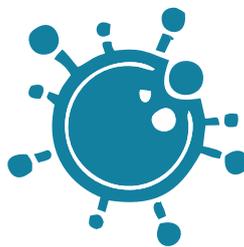
## The Great BEST Bake Off Competition

*We are on the hunt for the best baker, do you think you have what it takes?*

*You could be in with a chance of winning a £50 gift of your choice.*



*See page 6 on how to enter*



## COVID-19

We are currently running limited services due to the pandemic. The recent Government update now sees certain easements of restrictions and a return to work for some.

We are assessing and considering all associated risks before a full reinstatement of our operational team. We will continue to service the needs of our tenants and stakeholders with vigilance and commitment. Thank you for your cooperation at this time. Stay safe and stay well.

**Please visit our website for more information.**

**STAY SAFE**  
together we will get through this

# Welcome to BeST!



**Gurps Landa**  
Accounts Assistant

Some of my duties include maintaining day to day and monthly records for council tax, using Excel spreadsheets and Sage 50 Accounts, payments of council tax on-line or by telephone.

I have lived in Manchester most of my life, I first started out as a carpenter/joiner when I left high school but then sought out a different career when the days were cold, snowy, and dark. I then progressed into accountancy and have been doing that for the past 3 years.

I am grateful to know that I'm working for a charity to help others. In the past I've done the Manchester to Blackpool Bike Ride and fought in a White Collar Boxing Match for the British Heart Foundation and have obtained my 25th donor badge from the NHS for donations of blood, plasma and platelets.

In my spare time I enjoy playing snooker, football, rock climbing and badminton as well as going out to comedy clubs, my favorite stand-up comedians are Peter Kay and Russell Peters.



**Max Bowden**  
Maintenance Administrator

I started working at BeST mid-February and my role as Maintenance Administrator was a complete change from where I worked previously at a call centre.

The team welcomed me and made me feel relaxed from day one. As well as processing invoices, I look after the gardening and window cleaning aspect for the properties we manage. I enjoy gardening myself and know that being outdoors is a real mood booster.

I would like to visit the other departments to see what they do; I think it would give me a better understanding of the company as a whole. I haven't had the opportunity yet because as soon as I settled in, we were all told to go home for COVID-19 lockdown! Things are looking promising for returning, and I'm sure it will soon feel like we've never been away.



**Richard Lowthian**  
Head of Housing

The main purpose of my role is to manage the delivery of a high quality, responsive and sensitive housing management service to existing and potential tenants through a team of housing/managers/officers and administrative support.

I am originally from Newcastle upon Tyne, a true Geordie! I met my wife at Newcastle University, who was from Preston and we moved to Preston approx. 24 years ago. I got the short straw! I have a daughter at high school.

I've really enjoyed working in a variety of social housing environments all my career that have been diverse, challenging, exciting, fun organisations and locations. I also successfully ran my own family business, an independent coffee shop called Ham & Jam with an art and cultural twist during a four year fun-filled moment of madness.



**Sandra Cardim**  
Portfolio Manager

As a Portfolio Manager I am responsible and accountable for the relationship between the organisation and its key stakeholders across a designated property portfolio.

Responsible for operations within my own specific portfolio and for delivering optimal results through working with other departments within the charity. This will include, but not be limited to, funders, superior landlords, support providers, local authorities, and internal resources of the charity, and to ensure the portfolio is fully compliant with regulatory standards and financially sustainable.

I have over 10 years' housing experience in the PRS and Social Rented Sector with an enhanced knowledge in Property Management and Compliance. The organisations I have worked with (Housing Associations and the Residential Landlord Association) represent over 50,000+ landlords with a combined portfolio of 380,000 properties.

In my free time I attend courses/workshops that allow me to keep up to date with UK and Portuguese Housing Law and Compliance. I also enjoy travelling, baking, and watching K-dramas.



**Kevin Kuchmak**  
Project and Planning Accountant

As Project and Planning Accountant, I am responsible for all things project related within the finance team, with a focus on budgeting and forecasting.

After spending a number of years in practice, I am excited to put my energies towards a charity and cause I deeply believe in as a member of the BeST family.

I am originally from Canada but have spent the last few years enjoying all the beauty the UK has to offer. Outside of work, you can usually find me with my nose in a book, writing and performing spoken word poetry, or simply in a pub with a well poured pint and good company.



**Peter Whitehead**  
Head of Revenues and Benefits

As Head of Revenues and Benefits I am responsible for the balances on the rent accounts, I manage a team that helps get Housing Benefit claims into payment and troubleshoot on problem cases. 85% of our tenants claim Housing Benefit to help with their rent whilst 15% pay their own rent.

My main role is the management of debt and making sure rent is paid on time. Housing Benefit is paid in arrears and our rent is charged in arrears so there is always a lot of debt to manage.

I have worked in Housing Benefit across different Local Authorities in the UK for the last 20 years, so I was brought in to focus on this area.

# Meet Our Tenants

👋 Hello! 👋

Welcome Emma, Emily Molly and Sue

Four of our tenants hosted a housewarming party where they invited their friends and family to visit their new home.

The party was well attended with over 40 guests and the ladies did a wonderful job of playing hostess, serving drinks and homemade cakes.

Emma said she loves living in her new home, Emily said, "It's so nice here, everyone loves spending time together".

Emma also said, "I'm really happy in my new home. I really like having the guinea pigs in the garden and I enjoy cooking fresh meals".



👋 Squeak! 👋

# Stephen's Story

Stephen had been in the same residential home since 1998, the home was closed following a CQC inspection and that is when Affinity Trust began supporting him. Stephen was de-skilled from his time in the home and very institutionalised, quiet and did not engage into conversation very well. Staff at Affinity Trust supported Stephen to develop an independent life in supported living.

Stephen is very able and enjoys mending things. Staff supported Stephen to find a work placement in a charity shop, he also enjoys helping with the Hednesford Park restoration project and now has 3 work placements in total and helps once a week at an allotment.

Stephen enjoys being independent and keeping busy, he loves the outdoors with his gardening, arts and crafts, work placements and doing what he wants to do safely.

Stephen is a chatterbox and enjoys telling people what he does. During the pandemic lock down, Stephen has been keeping himself busy with his arts and crafts on rainy days and on dry days he has been maintaining the garden and planting flowers, he also loves to feed the squirrels.



## What have you been up to during lockdown?

**Have you picked up a new hobby during lockdown?**

**Perhaps you have changed something around, or learnt something new?**

We would love to see a photo and hear about what you have been up to, send your photo along with your name, address and telephone number and a short description to

**[communications@bestha.co.uk](mailto:communications@bestha.co.uk)**



# Tenant Area

## The Great BEST Bake Off Competition

*Do you think you have what it takes?*

*Could you challenge the likes of Rahul, Sophie and Candice?*

*Then we want to see your baking, cakes, cookies, the whole lot!*



To enter, send a photo of your baking, along with your name, address and telephone number and a short description to [communications@bestha.co.uk](mailto:communications@bestha.co.uk)

The winner will receive a £50 gift of their choice.  
**Entries close September 4th, 2020.**

Good  
Luck  
everyone.



## The BEST Christmas Tree Winners!

**We went on a hunt for the best Christmas tree and we have a winner!** Some fantastic entries but our winner this year is a gentleman in one of our Wigan properties, he had not put up a tree in over 10yrs but last Christmas he had 5 in total! Huge well done to our fabulous winner!

Our runners up are last year's winners, Emily, Jo and Laurence, with their recycled theme, they made decorations using toilet roll tubes plastic bottles and bottle tops and even a popcorn garland, how creative?! Well done, it was a tough one!

Thanks to everyone who entered, and we hope you join in the Christmas fun for 2020!



# Easter Fun

Easter was an unusual one this year with us all working from home and nowhere to go, but did we let that stop us having some Easter fun? Absolutely not!

We held a Best Easter Egg Competition over video chat with the team; can you guess the winner?



# BEST Pub Quiz

During lockdown to stay connected, the team have been taking part in a virtual 'pub' quiz every 2 weeks.

Staff have taken turns to host and we have had some great quiz masters, especially Ellie who has hosted twice and been very creative with her questions! Her 'Guess the Object' round got a few people, can anyone tell us what these are?



# Thank You! From the Repairs and Maintenance Team

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our tenants, partners and stakeholders for the help, assistance and support they have shown during this very challenging time. Everyone has had to adapt the way in which we conduct our day-to-day activities and even how we socialise. BeST have had to adapt to meet all the Government guidelines, whilst continuing to provide an effective and efficient Repair and Maintenance service to the most important people we know, you our tenants.

BeST have had to work even closer with our partners to ensure we continue to provide a service, whilst keeping everyone safe. We are providing the necessary PPE to our staff and our partners have been supplying PPE such as face masks, disposable gloves and hand sanitiser to their workforce.

To ensure compliance with all the guidelines and for health and safety reasons, BeST have had to make the decision to only carry out urgent and emergency repairs. Non-urgent repairs can still be reported but will be put on hold until it is deemed safe to carry them out. We would like to assure you that once lockdown measures have been lifted and we can resume, we will get your non-urgent repairs completed as soon as possible.

**Our OUT OF HOURS SERVICE is still in place, for emergency repairs only. If you have an emergency repair outside of working hours, please call our OOH number on 07534 089962.**

Thank you once again for your continued support during this pandemic.

*Alan Winstanley  
Head of Repairs and Maintenance*



**Our quarterly performance reports for repairs and maintenance call outs are:**

SAME DAY

**97%**

24 HRS

**90%**

ROUTINE REPAIRS

**95%**

FIXED FIRST TIME

**90%**





## Housing Management General Reviews

Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, the Housing Management Team have not been able to carry out our annual, general review of schemes. As lockdown measures are gradually relaxed, the Housing Management Team will be liaising with support providers to carry out these vital reviews.

## Housing Management Training

During lockdown we have still been very busy to ensure our staff have tip top skills, knowledge and understanding of key areas of the services we deliver, we have all enjoyed being involved in a number of important training sessions, including; Mental Health & Learning Disabilities, Dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour during the pandemic and Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults.

## Tenant Involvement and Engagement

We really care about what our tenants think about our services and we are excited about improvements we can make. You may have been one of the lucky 100 tenants who were sent a Tenant Satisfaction Survey form to complete over recent months. This was only a pilot survey to get an idea on how good, bad, or indifferent you feel our services are.

We had a great response and we have decided to increase the number in this pilot so we can gain a broader picture of how our services are received by our tenants.

Watch this space for the results and how we intend to engage further with our tenants and communities.

*Richard Lowthian*  
Head of Housing

# Universal Credit

The Universal Credit standard allowance, and the working tax basic element were increased by £20.00 per week in response to COVID-19. Effective from April 6th, 2020, for a period of 12 months (to be revised in 2021). This means that claimants will receive an extra £1040.00 for the year.

Face-to-face sickness and disability assessments were suspended for 3 months from March 17th, 2020. The DWP are in the process of reviewing this measure and will confirm the next steps shortly.

Video and telephone hearings are being made available, across all social security tribunal regions, to minimise the risks of COVID-19.



The tribunal will consider service users' difficulties in using technology, and in some cases, it will be deemed that the hearings will be heard on paper.

**For more information visit the GOV.UK website or visit this link <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/hmcts-telephone-and-video-hearings-during-coronavirus-outbreak>**

*Patricia Mokhberi*  
Compliance Manager

**UC** Universal  
Credit

# A Message From the Chair

You will have heard that we have had some changes on the Board, with a number of long serving members standing down. The Board are working with the Executive team, to get BeST to a position that complies with the expectations, of both the Regulator of Social Housing and the Charities Commission. There has been some good progress on health and safety issues and our focus now is:

- To understand our leases better
- To be able to show that our rents comply with what the Regulator expects
- To understand what we have to spend on our properties in the short, medium and long term
- To only take on new properties where we are contractually committed
- To produce a long-term financial plan

All of these will be used to put together a new Corporate Plan. At the same time as doing all this, it is very important that we don't forget our customers. We are all grateful for the efforts made to keep a level of service in these difficult times. I really hope that we are all able to get together again, in the not too distant future, to explain this more fully and answer any questions you may have.

In the meantime, I would like to thank everyone for all you are doing and please stay safe.

*Tom Miskell,  
Board of Trustees Chairman*

## Regulatory Update

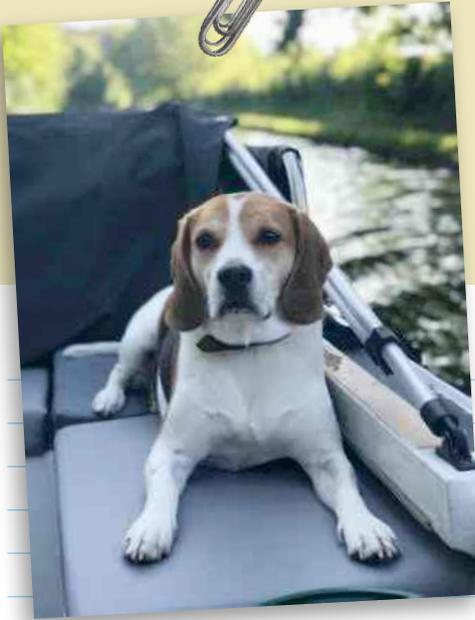
We are continuing to make progress and have made fundamental changes to our processes and service delivery, which overall will see further improvements across the charity.

The Regulator has an extremely important job in monitoring Registered Providers in their plight to deliver affordable accommodation, in line with their expectations, obligations and in meeting the demand of the sector.

The Regulator has concern in general, about Registered Providers' ability to meet lease liabilities, should an unforeseen risk crystallise. Understandably, their concerns are valid as recent editorials suggest, many Registered Providers have come under pressure and scrutiny due to their financial modelling and risk planning.



These issues for most providers will be considered key priorities for the immediate future. Alongside this fundamental criterion, our tenants' safety is paramount and must be upheld, and services delivered to a compliant standard.



## What's Eric Been Up To?

Hey guys, it's Eric here. I've got to say I'm getting a bit fed up with this lockdown. I'm stuck with my two annoying sisters and they're driving me mad! All they do is pick on me, even though they are small, they can be pretty feisty at times. It's like a wrestling match in our house, Pearl pins me down while Coco ruffs me up a bit. I think it's because they're jealous of me; I mean what can I say, I've got the looks and the personality! Plus, secretly I'm Mum's favourite, she likes me more than anyone at home.

I am missing quite a lot of things while we are in lockdown though, I can't go to my caravan and run free in the fields, that's the only bit of alone time I get! I'm not allowed to meet up with my fellow woofers, which is really boring, but I'll get over it I guess. But seriously, shutting down doggy day care, that's a whole other level!! What about my trampoline time and my photo shoots? Who's going to make the woofers Instagram feeds actually look decent while I'm gone?!

One of the things that has changed during lockdown is how many walks I get, OMG! Everyone is complaining that they can't go to the gym, well I've never done sooo much exercise in my life. Mum takes us out bright and early every morning walking for miles; our paws are red raw and sometimes it's even before my breakfast as well. Like that's unacceptable!! I need my grub before any physical activity...

I love my food, and the metre-long chew bones I have been getting, it's like we have won a lottery of dog treats! I think I'm getting a few belly rolls though, so better keep on my seafood diet. Have you heard of it? Everyone is trying it, so basically you see food and you eat it. I think it's working, and I must say I am loving it!

I am not surprised at the amount of treats I am getting though, considering my improved behaviour during lockdown, I have stopped being such a rebel and chewing the wallpaper, now Mum and Dad say I'm mature and old enough to cope and they let me sleep where ever I want, it's great!

Something else has also happened, Dad bought an old BOAT! I am so excited to go on the canal with the wind blowing in my fur, sat on the deck with a doggy life jacket. Lots of wonderful memories to come in the future and I might even get a skipper hat. I'm sure Mum will have us dressed up in some form of costume, she always does. But at least were spending lots of time together as a family which is what counts. Until next time pawsome friend's... Bon Voyage!

**Eric, BeST Mascot**



# Talk To Us

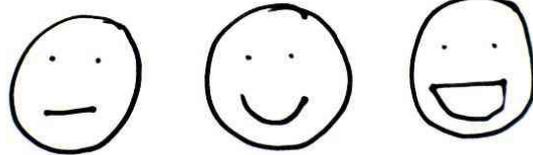
We want to hear from you!

We want your views -  
What is working?  
What is not?

**You can help us improve!**

If you want to get involved, or just simply let us know how you feel towards us then please get in touch.

## Feedback



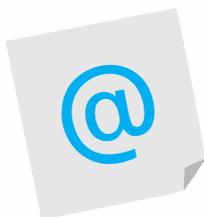
### You can



Phone us on:  
**0161 786 6000** and select option 1  
and ask for Casey Willis



Write to us at:  
**Bespoke Supportive Tenancies**  
**2a Sentinel House**  
**Albert Street**  
**Eccles**  
**M30 0NA**



Email us at:  
**[communications@bestha.co.uk](mailto:communications@bestha.co.uk)**

Thanks  
for  
reading  
me!



## Tenant Satisfaction Surveys Update

We are still sampling our Tenant Satisfaction Surveys, with a further 100 copies being sent at random by email, if you would like a copy then please get in touch by email at [communications@bestha.co.uk](mailto:communications@bestha.co.uk)

*Casey Willis,*  
Communications Officer