

BITS & PIECES

SEPTEMBER 2020

THE **BITMO** NEWSLETTER FOR BELLE ISLE TENANTS & RESIDENTS

KEEPING BELLE ISLE RESIDENTS AND STAFF SAFE

BY DEBORAH KELLY, BITMO CHIEF EXECUTIVE



I hope you are well

Welcome to this edition of Bits & Pieces where you can read about how we've been doing our best at BITMO to support our customers and our community, and about how we are preparing to resume some of our services to you. In the midst of this seemingly never ending public health challenge that we are all dealing with there are no easy solutions, and no quick way to get back to normal.

The priority for BITMO during the Covid-19 outbreak has been to do everything we can to keep our residents and staff safe.

Our colleagues adapted quickly to the first phase of lockdown and were able to support BITMO residents in a host of different ways. We continued to complete all critical repairs, maintained our programme of (socially distanced) urgent housing visits and ensured our caretaking and environmental services continued. We have since expanded the repairs and other services we are able to offer and will continue to do so in a phased and safe way. We have made a successful and seamless transition to remote working for all of our office based colleagues.

In parallel, we rolled out a programme of calls to our older and more clinically vulnerable residents, checking on their wellbeing, signposting them to other support services and supporting wherever we can.

We have heard everyday stories of our colleagues and our residents going the extra mile - from participating in activities to combat isolation, through to supporting food banks. While it has been a worrying time it has also shown what can be achieved with a shared commitment and collective effort to help one another.

We are dealing with a significant backlog of repair requests (400 in fact), and our contractor Mears is working through

these as quickly as they can, but they don't yet have a full staff team so things will take some time. Please bear with us while we do our best to serve you.

Properties are starting to be advertised and we have been able to hold some socially distanced coffee mornings for our sheltered residents. The risks to customers and staff associated with face to face service delivery and attending the office are still considerable, while the virus is still active, so our service offer remains telephone based at this time. Some visits, such as to deal with arrears, untidy gardens, property condition and mutual exchanges are starting to take place. Where they do happen, our staff will wear PPE to protect you and themselves.

We have welcomed four new members of staff, having carried out interviews via Skype or at a carefully controlled distance, and we are now inducting our new colleagues while working remotely.

We welcome:

- **Andrew Walker** as new Head of Repairs Maintenance and Investment
- **John Clark**, Management Accountant
- **Michala Parker** and **Janice Thackray**, Customer Assistants. The addition of these four new colleagues will make a huge difference to our quality of service and effectiveness.

Some familiar faces have changed roles.

- **Keith Wigglesworth** is taking up a role supporting volunteers and people seeking work and training.
- **Debbie Longley** has been promoted to the role of Customer Services Team Leader see back page to get to know Debbie and her vision for our front line service.
- **Tracey Hall** has moved from finance to cyclical maintenance taking care of the gas safety programme among other things.

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We have strengthened our service offer by creating a Tenancy Support Team headed up by Lesley Fothergill. We will tell you more about this in the next edition.

We are continually reviewing how we can provide the best service to you while following Government advice and we will keep you informed as we develop our plans.

Since lockdown started in March we have regularly kept in touch with over a **hundred tenants who were self-isolating**, we have allocated funding from Radio Aire's Cash for Kids and Leeds City Council Community Committee to help **families who were struggling** because of the impact of COVID-19. We've worked with Windmill Children's Centre to support nearly 50 families by adding money on to their

electricity and gas pre-payment meters and providing food shopping vouchers.

We applied through a charity called DevicesDotNow! for a supply of **tablets with SIM cards** to distribute to 10 families who really need to be online to maintain income and education.

We are pleased to have received these funds and devices, and that we were able to help families in need, but we are aware that there **is a lot more need out there** (see page 3 for help available).

Our AGM took place on 24th September. It was an opportunity for all BITMO Shareholders to vote on Board membership and receive information on the activities of the last year. A full report will be provided next time.

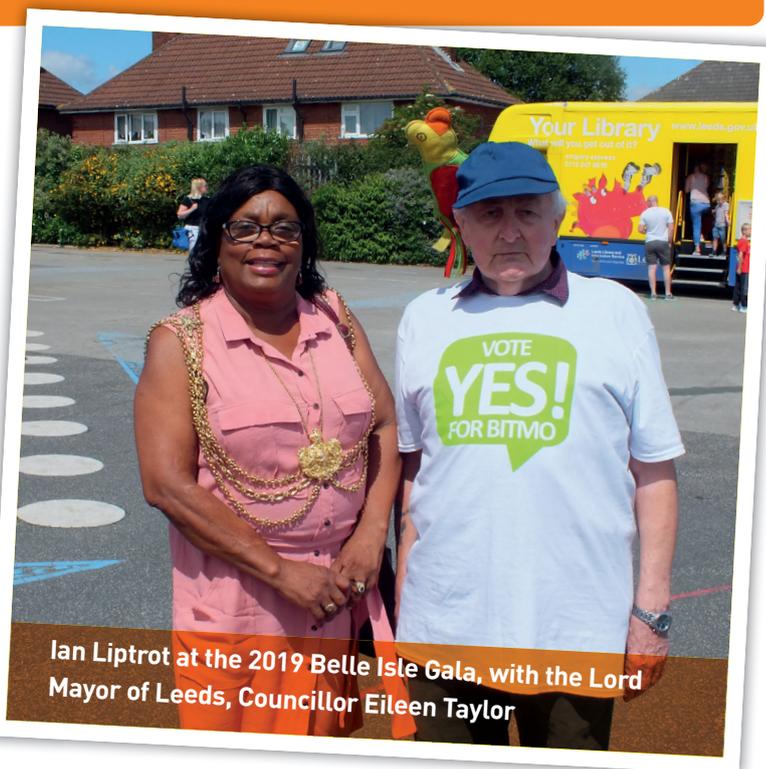
We cannot wait to be fully operational and providing you with the full range of BITMO services but in the meantime, stay in touch via the usual channels and let us know how you are coping and the difference you are making to Belle Isle!

BELLE ISLE VOLUNTEER RETIRES AFTER 20 YEARS

Having joined Belle Isle North EMB (Estate Management Board) in the late 90s, Ian Liptrot helped to bring about significant changes to the way housing services were managed across Belle Isle, which led to the creation of Belle Isle Tenant Management Organisation in 2004, known locally as BITMO. After 20 years of championing local housing services, Ian will officially retire as a Board Member at BITMO later this month at BITMO's Annual General Meeting.

Ian's wife Paula- who was also well known for her community volunteering work, and of course her scones- sadly passed away at the end of 2019. Ian decided that the time was right to retire and step down from his role on BITMO's Management Board, saying, "**Myself and Paula always enjoyed being a part of BITMO; attending the monthly meetings, AGMs (Annual General Meetings) and community events, like the Belle Isle Gala. We met some great friends, had a lot of laughs, but everything we did at BITMO was to help bring the people of Belle Isle together and make it a great place to live. Board Members have such an important role at BITMO; having a say on local investments, proposals, and services for the community. I am proud to have a TMO in Belle Isle, and I'm proud of the work it carries out**".

Ian said, "**Over the years, by being involved and volunteering with BITMO, I've seen how much of a**



Ian Liptrot at the 2019 Belle Isle Gala, with the Lord Mayor of Leeds, Councillor Eileen Taylor

community Belle Isle has become. I would encourage anyone who wants to make a difference to where they live to get involved in any way they can."

Leon Kirkham, Chair of BITMOs Board said, "**On behalf of the Board and staff team, I would like to wish Ian well in his retirement from his role on the Board. His commitment and dedication to Belle Isle TMO will be very much missed**".

From all your colleagues and friends at Belle Isle TMO....

Thank you for everything you have done for Belle Isle. Enjoy your retirement, but stay in touch!

FREE SUPPORT FOR BELLE ISLE RESIDENTS

While the GATE remains closed due to COVID-19 restriction, we'd like to reassure you that free help, support and advice is still available.

If you are struggling to get food because you have lost income, contact **Leeds Welfare Support Team** on 0113 376 0330

One You Leeds can help you to live a healthier lifestyle, offering support to: **Be Smokefree, Manage Your Weight; Eat Well; Move More and Cook Well**, call 0800 169 4219

Contact **Forward Leeds** for help with drug and/or alcohol use on 0113 887 2477

Citizens Advice provides confidential and independent advice on issues including **benefits, tax credits, debt, housing and employment**. You can contact them on 0113 223 4400

For **advice, support and treatment** to individuals, families and communities affected by gambling, contact **Leeds Community Gambling Service** on 0113 388 6466

Childline provides support and counselling services to young people aged 0-19, call 0800 1111

Anyone **experiencing a crisis** can call the **Samaritans**, which is open 24 hours a day, every day, on 116 123

Safe Zone is a telephone crisis line for young people aged 11-17 on Mondays, Thursdays and Sundays 7pm-9pm by calling 0113 819 8189

Teen Contact offers **emotional support** to young people aged 11-18, weekdays from 3.30pm- 2am, and weekends 6pm to 2am by calling 0808 800 1212 or text 0771 566 1559

Leeds Domestic Violence Service helpline provides confidential advice to those **affected or experiencing domestic abuse**, call 0113 246 0401. For immediate danger, call 999 and press 55 if you're unable to speak

If you've experienced a **hate crime**, report it to **Stop Hate UK** on 0800 138 1625

Leeds Carers Advice Line provides information and advice services to carers, call 0113 380 4300



If you are pregnant or have children under 4 years old and are claiming certain benefits, you may qualify for **vouchers to help buy milk, fruit and vegetables, and vitamins**. Call Healthy Start on 0345 607 6823 or apply online at www.healthystart.nhs.uk

If you are **aged between 11-19**, you can text a 0-19 Specialist Public Health Nurse for **confidential health support and advice on sexual health, emotional health and wellbeing, any concerns around COVID-19, bullying, healthy eating or other general concerns**, text 07520 619750

Sadly due to COVID-19, the Community Coach Trip to Blackpool scheduled for October, the Christmas Party and the Christmas Market events will not be going ahead this year. The Community and Tenant Support Team are looking forward to planning community events for a time when COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

Members of the Community and Tenant Support Team are contactable by emailing gate@belleisletmo.co.uk, or calling **0113 378 2190** should you wish to speak to someone about your personal circumstances, and find out what help is available.

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EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

Following on from the staff re-structure, Keith joins Carla, Peter and Darren in our Community and Tenant Support Team. Keith's main focus will be helping people in to work, changing jobs or retraining. Keith will be working with our partners, such as the DWP and Leeds City College, to make sure we're able to offer you a really well-rounded advice and support service.

Keith will also lead on our work with volunteers. We want to extend the opportunities for volunteering and provide more support to our existing volunteers

WELCOME TO OUR NEW IMPROVED STRONG FRONT LINE!

Debbie Longley has recently been promoted within BITMO to the role of Customer Services Team Leader. This is a new role for BITMO and it brings together the front line service and the repairs team in one place to strengthen our overall service to you.

Debbie says "I've got so many ideas about how we can improve our service to you from virtual repairs diagnosis to no-surprises recharge processes. I'm excited about working with established and new colleagues to provide you with the right information and advice so you get the best customer service in Leeds. We may not get everything right but we will listen and respond, and use your feedback to improve our services".



COFFEE MORNING

On Wednesday 2 September, nine tenants enjoyed BITMO's first socially distanced outdoor coffee morning at Broom Nook. This was the first social gathering that has taken place in the Retirement LIFE complex since the COVID-19 lockdown began in March. The tenants were joined by Lesley, our Tenancy Support Manager, and Darren, one of our Community and Tenant Support Officers. Everyone adhered to government guidelines by wearing masks, keeping well-spaced out and limiting the amount of surfaces they each touched.

Lesley said, "It was great to have so many of our Retirement LIFE tenants get involved and thankfully the sun was shining on us! We know how hard living in isolation can be, and for many of our older tenants having to self-isolate meant a big change from their usual

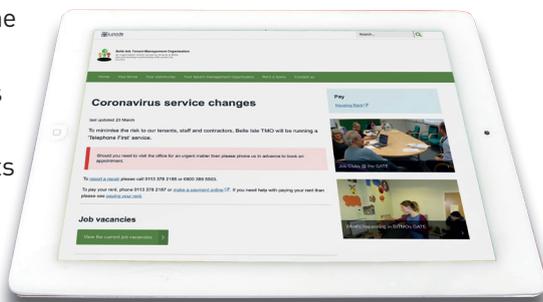


independent lives. Holding this coffee morning is hopefully the start of our journey back to regular get-togethers".

NEW LOOK WEBSITE!

This month, Belle Isle TMO launches its new look website at www.belleisletmo.co.uk

The website includes information on all services provided by BITMO as well as a guide on things to do in the area. We will continue to develop the website and want it to be a way for residents to comment on and suggest improvements to BITMO services.



PHONE NUMBERS – CUT OUT AND KEEP!

Here's a handy list of phone numbers and websites for you to cut out and keep somewhere safe- maybe stick to your fridge or notice board at home.

Report a repair call 0113 378 2188 or 0800 389 5503

Make a rent payment call 0113 378 2187

Report anti-social behaviour call 0113 387 2188

Report issues with bins and bin collections call 0113 222 4406 or download the Leeds Bins app

