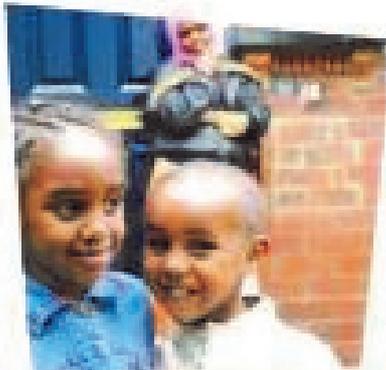


Annual report to tenants 2009/10



A new kind of report:

- Written for tenants,
- With direct input from tenants,
- Checked by tenants,
- Approved by tenants.

Find out about:

- How the service you get from Unity measures up to national standards,
- What Unity's got planned for 2010/11,
- How your rent compares to other landlords,
- How you can ask for better, more tailored services.

So what's this all about?

Introduction from Alicia Whittaker - active Unity resident

Welcome to Unity's annual report to tenants. It tells you about the standards that Unity has to keep to and how well it met them in the year from April 2009 - March 2010. I have scrutinised the information that has gone into this report, and believe that it is accurate.



As a resident, I believe that Unity needs to have a better relationship with us. If residents' confidence in Unity is boosted, we can be empowered to get involved and have a sense of ownership about our homes and neighbourhoods.

I believe that we all deserve a 100% excellent service. But for things to improve, residents need to be actively involved in planning, delivering and monitoring the services we receive.

My overall involvement with Unity has been a very positive and rewarding one. The training I have received has given me confidence when applying for jobs and in my day-to-day life. I now have skills I didn't have before, which helped me tremendously when I became employed.

Please take the time to look at the involvement calendar on the back page of this report - it would be great to have more people involved this year.

Hope to see you soon, *Alicia Whittaker*

A word from the Chief Executive, Ali Akbor

Every now and again, it's good to celebrate some success. And that's certainly the case at Unity Housing where we've enjoyed a successful year - both operationally and financially.

High points included our home insulation programme, which was completed just in time for the hardest winter in thirty years. And our kitchens programme is ahead of schedule, which moves everyone else closer to the top of the list.

The hard work we've put in to improve our service is paying off, as shown by the huge leap in satisfaction in our last STATUS survey. However, we are not complacent with this, and will strive to increase our satisfaction levels.

I would like to thank all the tenants who helped to design this report, or got involved in other ways. Their time and dedication is appreciated.

Ali Akbor



Unity - are we up to standard?

The *Tenant Services Authority (TSA)*, the organisation that regulates housing associations like Unity, has set six standards that we have to meet. They are:

1. **Tenant involvement and empowerment**
2. **Home** (repairs & maintenance)
3. **Tenancy** (lettings & rent)
4. **Neighbourhoods and community**
5. **Value for money**
6. **Governance and financial viability**

The TSA says that we have to send you a report each year to tell you how well we're meeting the first five of the standards. If you want more information about the sixth (governance and financial viability), you can find Unity's last 'regulatory judgement' on the TSA's website. It shows that they are happy with how we are run.

If you want to know more about the standards, the TSA has produced a report aimed especially at tenants - ***What does the regulatory framework mean for you?*** You can download it from their website or ask us to send you a copy.



Tenant Services Authority

www.tenantservicesauthority.org

T: 0845 230 7000

Listening to you

How can we provide you with the best service possible if we don't know what you want?

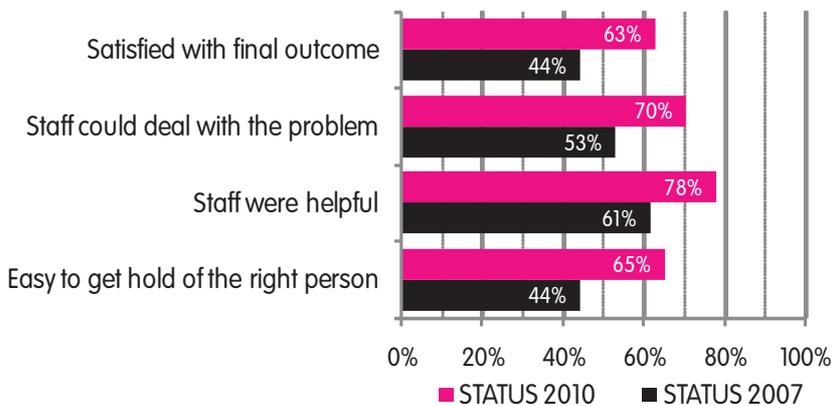
How well did we do?

Customer service & complaints:

We had 28 official complaints, which were all dealt with within our target time of 10 working days. However, **only 68% of complainants were satisfied** with how their complaint was dealt with. We aim to improve this to 75% in 2010/11.

In spring 2010, we used our STATUS survey to see how happy you were. The results showed that our **customer service has really improved** over the last three years - look at the graph!

Question: How did you feel about your last contact with Unity?



Involvement & empowerment:

There was a lot of successful resident involvement this year.

- We pioneered a successful **play project** in Meanwood.
- 286 tenants took part in our mini-STATUS survey in spring 2009. As a result, over **70 problems** were dealt with and every single suggestion for **scheme improvements** was considered for funding.
- Tenants took part in a successful review of our **gardening service**, which resulted in new contractors being appointed with a **10% saving** on costs. This saving makes rent cheaper for tenants with shared gardens.
- Our quarterly **comments cards** in *Unity News* were popular and over 80 were returned. When a tenant complained that our **rent arrears letters** were too abrupt, we changed them and asked her to approve the new versions. She found them to be 'firm but fair'.

Diversity & equality:

To meet our tenants' needs, we have to know who they are. We tried to **collect census information** for all our homes, but failed to because many tenants chose not to send the forms back. So we've changed the system. Instead, tenants can expect a phone call every three years to update their records.

What standards should you expect?

1. TENANT INVOLVEMENT & EMPOWERMENT

- There's a wide range of ways for you to have your say about your home and the services you receive.
- Unity offers you training to make your involvement more effective.
- You can ask for a 'local offer' - a service tailored to suit people in your area or with similar needs.
- It's easy to complain, and complaints are dealt with quickly, politely and fairly.
- Unity understands that different tenants have different needs, and knows what these needs are.



Overall tenant satisfaction went up from 67% to 79% - a huge leap in just a year.

Plans for 2010/11

Better involvement options: We're publishing a clearer involvement guide and will put a quarterly calendar in each issue of *Unity News*.

Louder voice for tenants: There weren't enough opportunities this year for residents to get actively involved in how Unity's managed. And our active tenants want more confidence that Unity keeps its promises. Our answer? **Three regular Tenant Panels** where tenants can meet staff, scrutinise what Unity is doing and suggest improvements.

Knowing our residents: We are introducing a rolling programme of phone calls to update residents' details. At the same time, we'll make sure that vulnerable households get extra help.

Looking after our homes

Repairs has always been our most important service to you, and you want modern, attractive fittings.

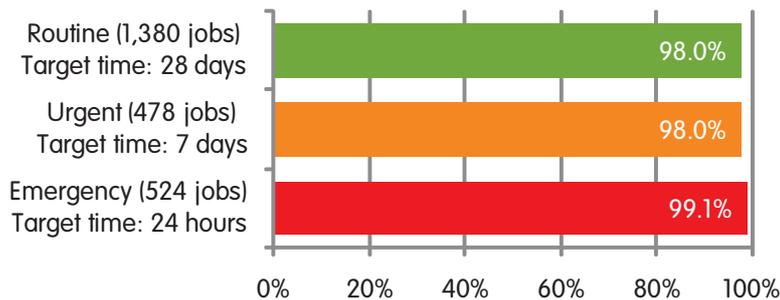
How well did we do?

All Unity's homes meet the government's 'Decent Homes' standard, which means our homes are warm, weather-proof and have reasonably modern facilities. This compares well to other local housing - over 11% of council homes in Leeds are still likely to be non-decent in 2015.

Our autumn 2008 survey of our oldest 246 homes showed that **kitchen replacements** were tenants' top priority. So we made it our top priority, and sent a 5-year maintenance plan to all tenants showing when they could expect a new kitchen.

Our Tenant Maintenance Panel worked hard on our new '**kitchen choices**' brochure, giving tenants a better range of finishes and the option to customise their own kitchen.

We did a total of **2382 repairs** this year. The graph below shows how many of them were done within our target time.



Our records show that we fixed **95% of repairs at the first visit**. Active tenants were concerned that the true number of 'first time fixes' might be lower, so we're looking at better ways to find out how many jobs are done 'right first time'.

Replacement programmes	How many did we plan to do?	How many did we actually replace?
Kitchens	103	147 new kitchens
Bathrooms	7	30 new bathrooms
Window & doors	36	82 new windows/doors
Boilers	47	47 new boilers
Digital TV aerials	271 homes	126 homes' aerials

If you're wondering how we managed to afford so many **extra kitchens, bathrooms, windows & doors**, it was by driving down costs with contractors and spending a bit of extra money that we'd saved elsewhere.

We did 27 **adaptations for disabled tenants** at a total cost of £9,470. Where people needed more expensive work (over £1,000) we helped them to apply for a grant from the council.

What standards should you expect?

2. HOME STANDARD

- Homes meet the government's 'Decent Homes' standard.
- The repairs service is cost-effective and meets tenants' needs.
- Tenants have choices.
- We aim to get things 'right first time'.
- Health & safety regulations are kept to.
- You can ask for a higher 'local standard' - a service tailored to suit people in your area or with similar needs.



Our new, improved kitchens were fitted in 142 Unity homes.

Tenant satisfaction with our repairs & maintenance service this year increased from 60% to 74% - a fantastic result.

Plans for 2010/11

Joining forces to save money: Bigger contracts get cheaper prices and better service, so we're looking at setting up a **joint repairs & maintenance service** with Leeds Jewish Housing Association.

Appointments: Some tenants say that contractors don't give enough notice when they're coming. We're going to work with our Tenant Maintenance Panel to agree **how much notice is reasonable**.

Tenant improvements: If tenants are prepared to put money into their homes, how should Unity recognise their investment? We'll look at options.

Where the money's spent: By joining our **Tenant Maintenance Panel**, tenants will be able to influence how our budgets are set and monitored.

Letting homes, rents and tenancy

With firm but fair lettings and management, we can create successful communities in good places to live.

How well did we do?

Lettings:

We are part of Leeds Housing Register, the 'choice based lettings' scheme in Leeds. This saves our customers time and gives them more choices. We also cooperate with Leeds City Council by taking people in priority need off the waiting list. This year, **72% of our lettings were to council nominations**.

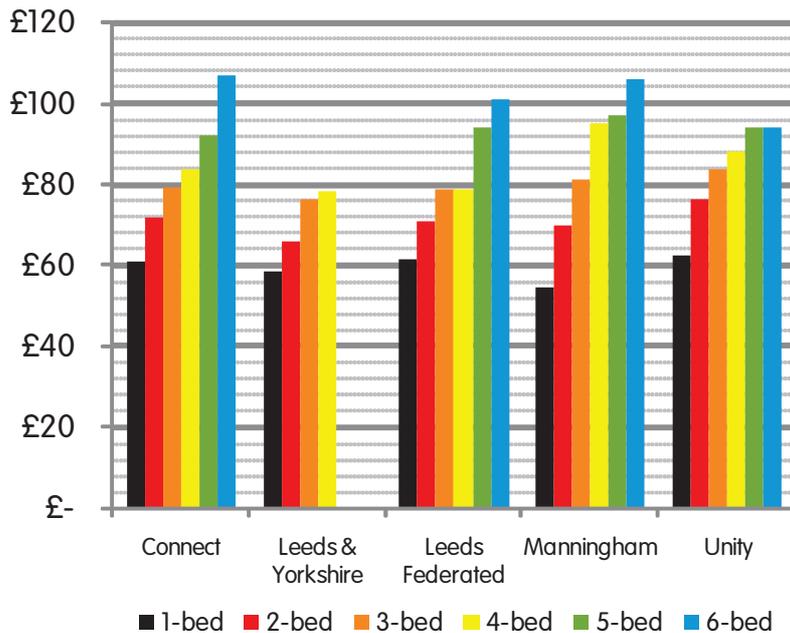
However, we use a tailored Unity lettings policy. When we let properties, we don't cram in as many people as we can. Instead, we try to **give families homes that will still suit them in a few years' time** when the children are older.

We have a wide range of information to help you move - two **tenant-approved leaflets**, and regular *Unity News* articles.

Rents:

Because of low inflation, we managed to reduce rents. The **average Unity net rent went down by 0.9%** at the end of this year. 'Net rent' means not including service charge.

The chart below shows **how Unity's net rents compare** to other local landlords. The figures are for assured, general needs homes. It shows that our 1, 2 & 3-bed homes are slightly more expensive, our 4 & 5-bed homes are competitively priced, and our 6-bed homes are the cheapest.



Support:

We set up a partnership with St Vincent's, to **support tenants who had problems with debt** or needed counselling. 19 tenants used St Vincent's support. Our best result was the resident who reduced their debts from £1319 to just £80!

What standards should you expect?

3. TENANCY STANDARD

- The rules for deciding who can move are fair and help to create sustainable communities.
- Unity should work with other landlords for the common good.
- Rents and rent increases are within limits set by the government.
- There's clear information about how to move and how to keep to your tenancy agreement.
- When tenants are struggling to keep to their tenancy agreement, Unity will offer support.



We started the year with a new development at Hird Street in Beeston, transforming run-down terraces into modern family homes with gardens.

Plans for 2010/11

Void repairs: Some of our tenants felt that it was unfair that Unity's empty homes are often brought up to a higher standard than their neighbours', who have been waiting longer. We will work with our **Tenant Panels** to review this.

New developments: Coming up...**new flats** on Chapeltown Road and **houses at Highfield Gardens** in Wortley. We're always looking for new opportunities to develop quality, affordable homes.

Good tenant incentives: If somebody looks after their home, pays their rent on time and doesn't cause any trouble, they're saving Unity money. Should they be rewarded for this? We're going to form a **working group** to look at some options.

Neighbourhoods & community

It's essential for us to keep neighbourhoods clean, tidy & safe by working with you and other agencies.

How well did we do?

Neighbourhood management:

Unity has two housing officers, both supported by a housing assistant. They manage around 500 homes each, which they **formally inspect four times a year**, as well as visiting them when they need it. If they notice that somebody isn't looking after their home, they talk or write to them and give them two weeks to sort it out.

About half of our tenants pay a service charge for looking after shared landscaped areas. This year, we set up a **tenant monitoring system** for the gardening service and reviewed it at the end of the growing season. Because there was still room for improvement, four tenants helped us to interview and appoint **new gardeners for 2010/11**.

Local area cooperation:

We've been working with other landlords, the council, the police and other agencies to solve area-wide problems. For instance, the council agreed to do **extra dog warden patrols** in Meanwood following residents' complaints about dog fouling.

Unity Enterprise helps to provide jobs & training in the Chapeltown area by letting office space in three centres. And our **Stepping Stones** project brought **free, back-to-work training** to residents in the most deprived areas of Leeds, all paid for by a £180,000 grant to a partnership that we set up.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB):

We have clear procedures for dealing with ASB and a tenant-approved information leaflet. We also survey everyone who reports ASB, to check how happy they are with the service. We logged **17 serious cases of ASB** cases this year. Tenants felt that Unity residents experience a lot more ASB than this, so we need to improve how we log less serious cases.

In our spring 2010 STATUS survey, 38 tenants (out of 385 replies) said they'd reported ASB during the last year. **58% of them were satisfied** with advice from staff. However, less than half of them were happy with other things like being kept informed, staff support or speed of action.

Although this is a small sample group, we are disappointed that they were so unsatisfied with our ASB service. It is the only area where satisfaction has dropped over the past year. We will work to **dramatically improve the service** in 2010/11.

45% of tenants thought their neighbourhood had got better this year.

What standards should you expect?

4. NEIGHBOURHOOD & COMMUNITY STANDARD

- Unity's estates and communal areas are kept clean and safe, through cooperation with residents and local agencies.
- We work with others to promote social, environmental and economic wellbeing in the areas where we have homes.
- Anti-social behaviour is tackled effectively and neighbourhood problems are dealt with before they get out of control.
- Residents find it easy to report anti-social behaviour and are kept well informed.
- You can ask for a higher 'local standard' - a service tailored to suit people in your area or with similar needs.



Our £100,000 environmental improvements programme was set by a panel of tenants. It improved security and re-vamped run-down areas.

Plans for 2010/11

Anti-social behaviour (ASB): We need to improve this service to match tenants' expectations and are holding a **tenants' focus group on 19th October**. We'll also contact everyone who reports ASB this year, to check how happy they are.

Gardening & cleaning services: We're going to prepare an **information & training pack** for tenants gardening monitors, to help them to do it better. Tenants asked us to put a **cleaners' signing sheet** in communal hallways.

Tenants in control: Our new **Neighbourhoods Panel** will meet every three months and check if Unity's up to scratch. Members can complain to senior managers or the Board if they're not happy.

Value for money

By using our financial nous to balance low costs with the right services, we make the most of your rent.

How well did we do?

Value for money is especially important for a small organisation like Unity. When it comes to things like repairs contracts or kitchens programmes, larger associations can 'buy in bulk' and get cheaper prices. We need to work harder to get the same savings.

Planned maintenance:

We know that our tenants' top priority is keeping their homes modernised - in particular, kitchens & bathrooms. So when we saved money in other areas, we spent **£26,000 extra on kitchens** and **£22,000 extra on bathrooms**. We also brought down the cost of our kitchens without sacrificing any quality, so **42 households had a new kitchen fitted that they weren't expecting** this year. This moves everybody else up the queue.

Service charges:

Six estates were consulted about whether they wanted to keep or change parts of their service charge.

Following mixed feedback, we worked with our tenants to review our gardening contract in winter 2009. This led to the appointment of a new company on a three-year contract, at a saving of at least £6,000 per year. This comes directly off tenants' rents.

Communal gardening contract:

£60,000 in 2009/10, down to £54,000 in 2010/11

Finding extra funds:

There's no point in leaving rooms empty in our office when they could be earning us money. By hiring out meeting rooms and office space, we made an additional £10,000.

By forming a partnership with two other housing associations and a community training company, we successfully won a £180,000 contract for providing back-to-work training for residents in our most deprived neighbourhoods.



As one of our Stepping Stones advisors, Baljit helps Unity tenants and other local residents to find the best help and training for them.

What standards should you expect?

5. VALUE FOR MONEY STANDARD

- Services are cost-effective, efficient and high quality.
- Services meet tenants' needs.
- Tenants are consulted about decisions that affect them directly, like service charges.
- Unity makes the most of the money it gets from tenants' rents, government funding and any other sources.

In 2010/11, we're working with Leeds Jewish Housing Association to see if we can 'bulk-buy' a better repairs & maintenance contract.



*Two small, expensive contracts...
...or one bigger, better-value one?*



Plans for 2010/11

Repairs & maintenance contract: We'll work with our **Tenant Maintenance Panel** to look at our options for getting a better value service by working with Leeds Jewish HA. If we decide to set up a joint contract, it's likely to start in April 2011.

Efficiency savings: Why spend money when you don't need to? With a bit of smart thinking, we're reducing costs in areas like waste management and electricity costs. We aim to **save at least £10,000** in 2010/11, which we will reinvest in areas that are a priority for our tenants.

Ask for a **local standard** - better service that suits you

As a Unity tenant, you have the right to ask for a **better or extra service** in areas like resident involvement, complaints, repairs & maintenance, estate management or anti-social behaviour. This is a new way of tailoring our services based on what tenants want, by making a 'local offer'. Our first offers will be in place by 1 April 2011.

You could **ask for a local standard** on things like how we consult with you, how we manage your neighbourhood or how the repairs service works. When we say 'local', this could mean a particular neighbourhood, or a particular type of household, e.g. wheelchair users or tenants in full-time work. If you want to suggest a local standard, please get in touch with us to talk about your ideas. Alternatively, you can come to one of our **monthly tenant panel meetings** (on the first Tuesday of every month) or come to a **focus group**.

This is what we're doing to find out what local standards our tenants want.

- **Equality & diversity:** Certain groups of residents are less happy with Unity's services - households containing a wheelchair user, or people from Black Caribbean and Pakistani ethnic groups. We're holding focus groups to see what they want.
- **Gardening service:** Some of our elderly and disabled tenants asked for an extra gardening service, as they find it hard to manage. In November 2010, we're setting up a working group to look at options for providing this.
- **Tenant incentives scheme:** Tenants who want to put money into improving their own homes feel that they're saving Unity money in the long term. We're going to work with our tenants to see how we can reward them for the responsible way they care for their home.
- **Neighbourhood standards:** We're working with our Tenant Neighbourhoods Panel to create a clear, comprehensive set of standards on how we manage our estates and neighbourhoods. Through this, we aim to improve how tidy, clean and safe our homes are.

Resident involvement calendar - autumn 2010

Tuesday 5th October	Tenant Maintenance Panel Meet up with Unity staff and other tenants every three months. You get to find out more and to use that knowledge to influence and change the service you get.
Tuesday 19th October	Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) focus group Our STATUS survey showed that people weren't happy with how well we were dealing with ASB. Come to this focus group if you want to suggest improvements.
Tuesday 2nd November	Neighbourhoods panel This meets every three months and looks at anti-social behaviour, neighbourhoods and estates.
Tuesday 16th November	Wheelchair-users focus group Households with a wheelchair user are generally less satisfied with our services. We're looking at how we can improve services to this group.
Tuesday 7th December	Tenant Involvement & Customer Care panel Are you interested in improving how Unity communicates with and listens to its residents? Then this three-monthly panel is the one for you.
Tuesday 14th December	Pakistani tenants' focus group Because this group of tenants is less likely to be satisfied with our services, we're holding a focus group to look at their needs.

Coming up... working group to look at a gardening service for elderly & disabled tenants