

# Annual Report to Tenants 2013/14



Homes & Enterprise

Supporting BME Communities  
and Multi-Cultural Neighbourhoods





Unity celebrates the completion of the refurbishment its office on Chapeltown Road.



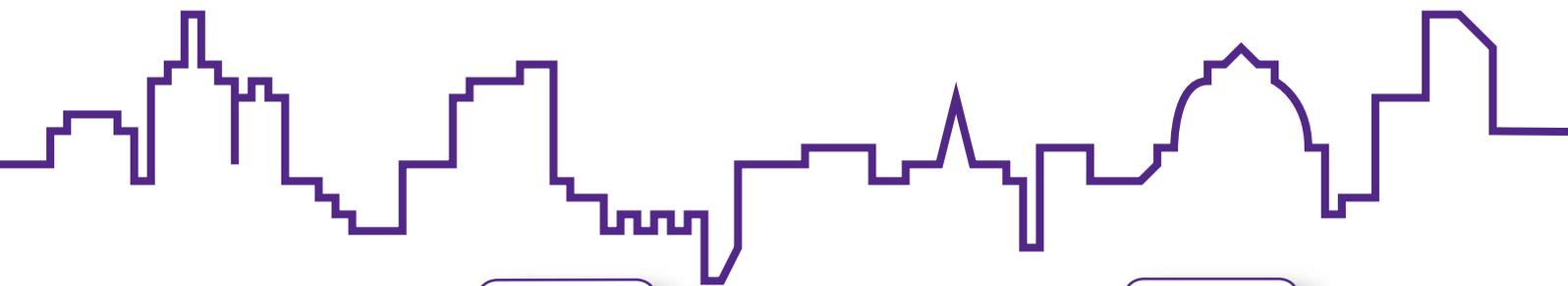
Unity is the proud sponsor of the Beeston Festival owing to the number of the properties we own in the area and our presence in the local community.



Unity becomes one of the many housing associations in the North involved in the Real Life Reform project - aimed at highlighting the impact of the Welfare Reform on the health and wellbeing of public-sector tenants.

April 2013

June 2013



May 2013

July 2013



An iconic Blue Plaque is unveiled at Leeds Media Centre, marking the building's importance in local history.

The summer kicks off with a series of workshops aimed at encouraging people to take care of their homes and gardens, grow their own fruit and vegetables at home, promoting healthy lifestyles and also encouraging residents to get to know one another.



Unity has a presence at the annual Holbeck Gala to promote affordable rent and shared-ownership opportunities on our next-planned development on Brown Lane East, Holbeck.

The craftspeople at Unity Business Centre host an exhibition to display their work and showcase the facilities the business centre has to offer those wishing to start their own businesses and enterprises.



Major refurbishment works commence on Unity Business Centre and Chapeltown Enterprise Centre, improving the service we are able to offer existing tenants and attracting new businesses and enterprises.



November 2013

Unity celebrates another year of providing housing choice, improving life opportunities and addressing inequalities at our AGM. Police & Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire is chief guest at the event.



September 2013

January 2014



February 2014

Unity is nominated for the CIH Award 'Small Social Landlord of The Year' owing to the work of the Employment Services Team and our dedicated Financial Inclusion Service.



December 2013

Work opportunities become available for local people due to the construction of Unity's new development on Brown Lane East. Unity helps local people to apply and as a result 10 people are offered work placements.



October 2013

The second report from the Real Life Reform project is published. MPs and policy-makers are presented with the findings.



August 2013

Unity is present at the Meanwood Olympics - an event aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles to local people. At the weekly event we were able to offer free advice to the general public on housing, welfare and employment.



# Our Objectives

- 1** Provide and continue to develop good quality mixed tenure housing which reflects needs and aspirations
- 2** Provide high quality affordable housing services
- 3** Involve and work with our tenants and the communities we serve to inform and improve services
- 4** Provide training and employment opportunities and promote financial inclusion.
- 5** Provide business support services and encourage local enterprise
- 6** Work with partners to encourage the regeneration of our target neighbourhoods
- 7** Be a progressive and expanding business with a sound resource base





# Tenant Involvement Standard

We sponsored the annual Beeston Festival to highlight our presence in the community and offer local people free advice on housing, welfare and employment.

## 2013/14 Highlights

We contacted all our shared-owners informing them of the services and opportunities that they had free access to.

We hosted a tenant Scrutiny Taster session in order to encourage tenants interested in helping influence decision-making at Unity at a more strategic level.

We identified 110 tenants who expressed an interest in involvement opportunities by means of a tenant-wide survey.

Tenants have been involved in inspections of all communal areas on our estates and making recommendations for improvements.

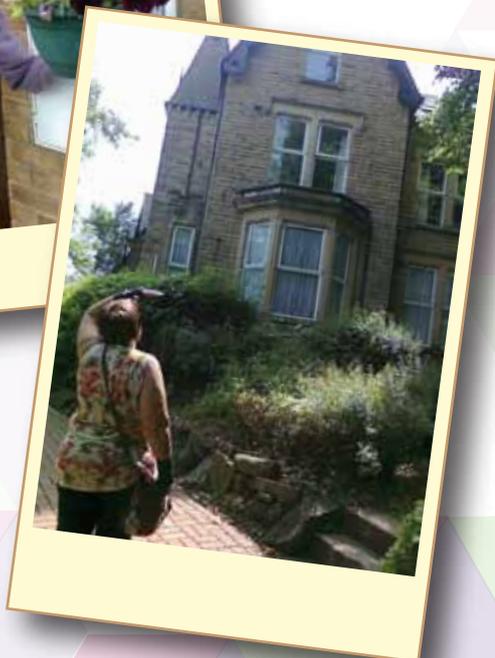
## Case study

### Tenant Panel pushes for perfection

In 2013, Tenant Panel members inspected the Fielding Gate estate in Armley, following reports from residents that it was in need of improvement. The estate comprises of good quality housing, but when they inspected it, it looked as if both Unity and the residents living there needed to take better care of it.

The following action was taken in response to the inspectors' findings:

- ✓ The Housing Officer attended a Tenant Panel meeting to hear their concerns and explain her approach to estate management.
- ✓ The Maintenance Team ordered repairs, including renewing some fencing and repointing the roof valleys.
- ✓ The Tenant Neighbourhood & Involvement Officer held a weekend gardening day, where she brought gardening tools and encouraged tenants to tidy their gardens and communal areas.



## Case study

# Unity in Bloom

In 2014, Tenant Panel members have been thoroughly involved in the selection process for Unity's new gardening and landscaping contractors.

Unity Housing is pleased to announce that we are now working in partnership with Leeds Federated Housing Association who employ in house staff.

Unity staff and residents alike have been involved in scrutinising the service standard on a number of estates since their contract began and have been very impressed with what they have seen.

Due to the size of the contract, the 'Community Spaces' gardening team have been able to offer their service at a competitive price. In fact, this is the fifth year that Unity's gardening costs have remained the same (with no inflationary increase) representing great value for money.

## Case study

# Leeds Collaborative Group

The Leeds Collaborative Group - an alliance of involved tenants from Unity Housing, Connect Housing, Leeds Federated and Leeds & Yorkshire Housing - have been involved in inspecting the quality of gardening services against service charges.

The Collaborative Group have visited a number of estates where service charges were high and made recommendations as to how they could be cut whilst maintaining the appearance of the estate.

Suggestions that they came up with included using coloured slate chips instead of turf, which still looks attractive but requires little or no maintenance.

The Collaborative Group also visited estates where tenants did not pay a service charge and therefore did not receive any visits from the gardening contractors. In these cases the Collaborative Group were able to identify schemes that needed more attention from the resident's in order to raise the standard of the estate.



## Case study

# ASB Scrutiny Review

Following the Tenant Panel's recommendation, Unity now formally records every complaint of anti-social behaviour, even very minor ones. A copy of the report is reviewed by our Tenant Scrutiny Panel and our Operations Committee.

Tenants are also asked for their feedback on how their case was handled and are given a courtesy call 4-6 weeks after the case is closed to ensure that they have not experienced any more problems.

# Ways of 'Getting Involved' Services and Opportunities

## Tenant Panel

Our Tenant Panel is a fun, friendly group of Unity residents that meets up monthly to discuss issues affecting the business, our homes and our tenants. Joining the Tenant Panel is a great opportunity for tenants to put across their views, share their ideas and help us shape the services that tenants receive.

In addition to the monthly meetings, members can take part in:

- ✓ Practical on-site inspections
- ✓ Joint inspections with tenants from other housing associations
- ✓ Interviewing and assessing contractors
- ✓ Community consultations with staff and residents
- ✓ Editing the newsletter and Annual Report to Tenants
- ✓ Influencing the planned maintenance programme

## Surveys & Focus Groups

For residents who take an interest in what's going on at Unity but are unable to attend regular meetings, we hold focus groups or consultations to find out what they think.

This could be about changes we are thinking about making from anything within the business including our service delivery, our policies and procedures, our homes and neighbourhoods and the way that we communicate with tenants.

## Joint Estate Walkabouts

If we are thinking about making changes to a particular neighbourhood we will actively seek local residents' opinions.

However, if tenants would like to be involved in decision making processes that affect neighbourhoods and communities other than their own, they can join our officers on estate walkabouts.



Tenants will help us decide what action to take, where improvements are required, and will help us to assess the work of our contractors.

## Tenant Scrutiny Panel

Tenants who want to challenge and influence how Unity's housing services are influenced are encouraged to join our Tenant Scrutiny Panel.

Tenant scrutiny of services is a cornerstone of ensuring that Unity is properly run. Our Scrutiny Panel meets every three months to closely examine how Unity is performing. Because it is a more committed role that requires particular skills, tenants have to apply to join the Scrutiny Panel.

**If you have lots of ideas about how Unity's services could be improved - we'd like you to join us. Please contact Lewis on 0113 200 7751.**



# Tenancy Standard

We have partnered with debt charity Step Change which offer free practical advice on overcoming problems with debt. We have a dedicated page on 'Money Worries' on our website with links to the service.

## 2013/14 Highlights

We appointed two Income Support Officers who aim to help tenants who are struggling to keep up with rent payments find a solution to meet their needs.

Staff have benefitted from training on loan sharks and pay-day lenders so as to warn customers of the dangers of using such services. Staff have also received training on debt advice services so as we are better equipped to refer customers to external agencies where appropriate.

Prospective tenants are asked to complete a housing needs assessment which will include examining their income and outgoings. This will help us to identify tenants who could benefit from some help from our Employment Team or our Financial Inclusion Service.

We have identified at least 47 tenants who could benefit from some IT training, to help them apply for jobs and to claim benefits online. We have delivered our own tailor-made training to 17 Unity tenants.

## Benchmarking Performance

	Unity Housing Association	Leeds Federated	Leeds & Yorkshire Housing	Sadeh Lok Housing	Connect Housing	Incommunities	Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing
Rent Collected Date	100.18% 13/14	97.71% 13/14	100.2% 13/14	100% 13/14	97.99% 13/14	96.8% 13/14	
Rent Arrears Date	6.84% 13/14	4.87% 13/14	3.20% 13/14	2.5% 13/14	4.78% 13/14	2.11% 13/14	
Average re-let times Date	23.4 days 13/14	28.3 days 13/14	28.4 days 13/14	38 days 13/14	60 days 13/14	67 days 13/14	36.05 days 13/14
Rent loss through voids Date	0.81% 13/14	1.2% 13/14	1.12% 13/14	1.9% 13/14	3.25% 13/14	1.8% 13/14	



## My year in Unity - Clive, Financial Inclusion Officer

- 71** Successful outcomes for tenants using my help
- 49** Successful applications for Discretionary Housing Payments
- 18** Tenants were able to claim back-payments of Housing Benefit due to legal loophole
- 10** Tenants were transferred to a more suitable property
- 15** Successful appeals against 'bedroom tax'
- 31** Referrals were made to Debt Advice services
- 7** Charity fund appeals for assistance with debts

## Our Year in Unity, Sam & Matt Income Support Officers

This year Unity appointed two Income Support Officers. If you are struggling to understand your rent statement or need some help managing your rent account, you may wish to speak to one of our Income Support Officers. Sam and Matt can help you come to an arrangement to clear any arrears you might have at a rate you can afford and help you to maintain your tenancy.

If you need some practical advice about how to manage debts, cut your spending and maximise your income by claiming all the benefits you are entitled to, Matt and Sam will work in partnership with Clive to assist you for free.

Call Sam on 0113 200 7737 or Matt on 0113 200 7733 if you could benefit from some free help and advice.

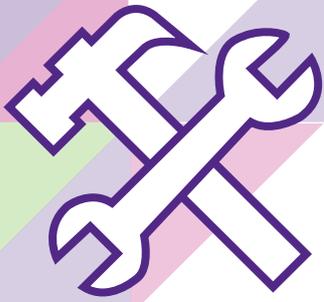


## Partnership Working

If you are experiencing difficulty paying your bills, we understand that you may wish to talk to someone other than your landlord. You could try one of these organisations:

- Step Change Debt Charity:** Gives free confidential advice and support over the telephone  
**☎ 0800 138 1111**
- Leeds City Credit Union:** Advice about getting access to fair-interest loans and help budgeting with a Budget Account.  
**☎ 0113 214 5252**
- Leeds Citizens Advice Bureau:** Leeds CAB has five bureaux sites across Leeds; they can offer appointments to advise on a range of issues.  
**☎ 0844 477 4788**





# Home Standard

We appointed a handyperson to carry out minor repairs and works on our properties. By using our in-house staff skills set we are saving the organisation money. Each lock change carried out by our handyperson saves the organisation up to £120.

## 2012/13 Highlights

Tenants are now offered advice about energy tariffs at the start of their tenancy and are move referred to the BillsCutter service.

We introduced the handyperson for hire service. Tenants are encouraged to make use of our handyperson service for a small fee.

All staff have benefitted from training on energy tariffs led by Groundwork's Green Doctor service. Guidance about energy tariffs has been published in our quarterly staff newsletter.

We hosted an energy efficiency workshop to offer tenants advice as to how to cut their energy bills by switching their supplier, understand their fuel bills, change their method of payment and use energy more economically.

## Benchmarking Performance

	Unity Housing Association	Leeds Federated	Leeds & Yorkshire Housing	Sadeh Lok	Manningham Housing Association	Kirklees Neighbourhood Housing	Incommunities
% emergency repairs completed on time	99% 13/14	98.7% 12/13		98% 12/13	98% 12/13	96% Q1 13/14	
% urgent repairs completed on time	98.6% 13/14	99.2% 12/13		97.7% 12/13	97.7% 12/13	96% Q1 13/14	99% 12/13
% routine repairs completed on time	99.1% 13/14	99.7% 12/13	95% Q1 13/14	97.6% 12/13	97.6% 12/13	96% Q1 13/14	100% 12/13
% homes with a valid gas safety record	100% 13/14		99% Q1 13/14	100% Q1 13/14	100% Q1 13/14	100% Q1 13/14	99.8% 12/13
% tenants satisfied with overall quality of the repair	97% 13/14			95.2% 12/13	95.2% 12/13	97% Q1 13/14	
% first time fixes	92.9% 13/14				80% 12/13		

# Key Performance Indicators

	UHA Target	Year End 2012/13	Year End 2013/14	Top Quartile National
<b>Emergency repairs completed on target</b>	99%	99.2%	99%	99.1%
<b>Urgent repairs completed on target</b>	99%	98.6%	98.6%	97.2%
<b>Routine repairs completed on target</b>	99%	98.2%	99.1%	97.5%

## Unity sets timescale priorities for types of repairs:

- Emergency** – Defects which pose a danger to health, safety and properties. Emergency repair jobs will be completed within 24 hours. We aim to complete 99% of these repairs within our priority timescale.
- Urgent** – Defects which seriously affect your comfort and convenience. Urgent repair jobs will be completed within 3 days. We aim to complete 98% of these repairs within our priority timescale.
- Routine** – Defects which cause minor inconveniences. Routine repair jobs will be completed within 21 days. We aim to complete 98% of these repairs within our priority timescale.

# Value for Money

We have appointed a Maintenance Administrator and a Handyperson. Our Maintenance Team now has the capacity to manage work normally undertaken by nominated sub-contractors in-house. This represents a saving of 12% on management costs.

We have let our communal and commercial alarm servicing and testing contract and made a saving of 34% against our budget.

We have entered a joint grounds-maintenance contract with Leeds Federated. This is the fifth year the contract has remained at the same price with no inflationary increase.

# Planned Maintenance Satisfaction

Unity has a planned and cyclical maintenance programme which is reviewed annually. The programme will be guided by the stock condition survey, formal and informal inspections by technical and housing management staff and where appropriate will reflect the views of our tenants.

When items in your home are being replaced, we will ask for your feedback on how satisfied you are with the end result.

*Service from Unity*  
*Service from contractor*  
*Quality of work*  
*Quality of materials*

## Kitchens (47/85 returns)

Happy	96%	96%	96%	96%
Okay	4%	4%	4%	4%
Unhappy	0%	0%	0%	0%

## Boilers (11/25 returns)

Happy	82%	82%	82%	82%
Okay	18%	18%	18%	18%
Unhappy	0%	0%	0%	0%

## Bathrooms (49/78 returns)

Happy	93%	93%	93%	93%
Okay	4%	4%	4%	4%
Unhappy	2%	2%	2%	2%

## Painting (62/216 returns)

Happy	90%	90%		
Okay	10%	10%		
Unhappy	0%	0%		



# Neighbourhood & Community Standard

We converted a disused hostel back into use. Umoja House, as it is known, provides accommodation for 6 families all of which are happy with their homes and neighbourhood.

## 2013/14 Highlights

We have developed an Employment Services Strategy which specifies the targets and aims for the Employment Team in 2014/15.

10 local people were offered work placements through our contractor Keepmoat to work on our next planned development on Brown Lane East, Holbeck. A further 6 local people have been offered work placements through our contractor Esh to work on another planned development, Stratford Court in Chapel Allerton.

We have changed the structure of our Housing Team so that we have dedicated officers to tackle neighbourhood issues and anti-social behaviour.



## Value for Money

- ✓ We have tendered all building contracts (including the refurbishment works on Unity Business Centre) to five contractors.
- ✓ We have benchmarked building costs and consultant's fees with similar organisations.
- ✓ We share resources with IT resources with Connect Housing to deliver to enable us to deliver IT training to more tenants in one class.

We began refurbishing both Unity Business Centre and Chapeltown Enterprise Centre to increase the services and facilities we are able to offer prospective and existing tenants.



## Unity Enterprise Refurbishment Works

Chapelton Enterprise Centre and Unity Business Centre have undergone major refurbishment works to improve the services that we are able to offer our business tenants.

Works included re-cladding roofs, new doors and windows, new lifts, re-wiring, new signage and data cabling for faster broadband. The improvements are worth £1.4 million and have been paid for by the European Regional Development Fund, Leeds City Council and Unity.

If you are thinking about starting your own business - there has never been a better time to make one of Unity's Enterprise Centres your base.

The spaces we have available would be ideal for someone thinking about starting their own business; our Network Business Advisor will be able to assist in setting up a business from scratch.



Have you always wanted to start your own business?

Do you have a business idea you would like support to develop into a successful business?

Our Network Business Advisor can offer you free professional advice and support to turn your dreams into reality.

Our Network Business Advisor can support you with developing your business idea from start to completion, business planning, marketing, cash flow forecasting, sourcing available finance and sourcing affordable work or office space at one of our business centres.

If you want to develop your business idea from conception to reality, please get in touch:

 0113 200 7000

 [hello@unityenterprise.co.uk](mailto:hello@unityenterprise.co.uk)





# Our year in Unity - Kelly & Noma Employment Services Team

Numbers that have benefitted from our help	Employment	Training	Voluntary
Total prior to March 2012	38	69	2
Total 2012/13	35	36	14
Target 2013/14	35	50	50
April - June	5	3	2
July - September	12	7	6
October - December	11	20	2
January - March	16	15	2
Total 2013/14	44	45	12
Target 2014/15	50	60	20



Unity Employment Services was set up in May 2011 to support Unity tenants and the communities in which they live to get back into employment and training.

The Team can help you with practical job skills such as preparing your CV, guidance for job searching and applications, and practising your interview technique.

## Case Study Charlotte, 25

Before meeting the Employment Team Charlotte had been made homeless due to living in disrepair from a private landlord.

Firstly the Employment Team recommended she attend our weekly housing information sessions with our Letting & Allocations Officer to get assistance with finding appropriate housing.

After receiving a bidding number from Leeds Homes and applying for homes she was offered a Unity property. When she had settled in she contacted the Employment Team to assist her with finding employment.

After 3 weeks Charlotte had found a job working in promotions for a nightclub in the city centre. This

was unsociable hours and her manager wasn't paying her frequently. This meant she started to fall into rent arrears. The Team arranged for her to speak to our Financial Inclusion Officer to see if she was entitled to any benefits.

The Employment Team continued to work with Charlotte to help her find a more secure job with more sociable hours.

In the meantime Charlotte attended college on a Health and Social Care course; she had done this type of work before but hadn't gained any qualifications to go with the experience.

The Team met Charlotte every week to apply for jobs to fit around college and after three weeks Charlotte was offered an interview at a retail outlet.

She has now finished college and is working full-time.



# Value For Money Standard

## Our Commitment

Unity is committed to achieving Value For Money (VFM) and to focus on embedding good practice into the whole organisation. VFM has been defined as the relationship between economy, efficiency and effectiveness. VFM is high when there is an optimum balance between all three - relatively low cost, high productivity and successful outcomes. VFM is about running a viable social business and looking to continuously improve it. It is about doing the right things for the least cost by doing these things right first time. In short, VFM should be the driving force behind everything we do.

## Procurement of Contracts

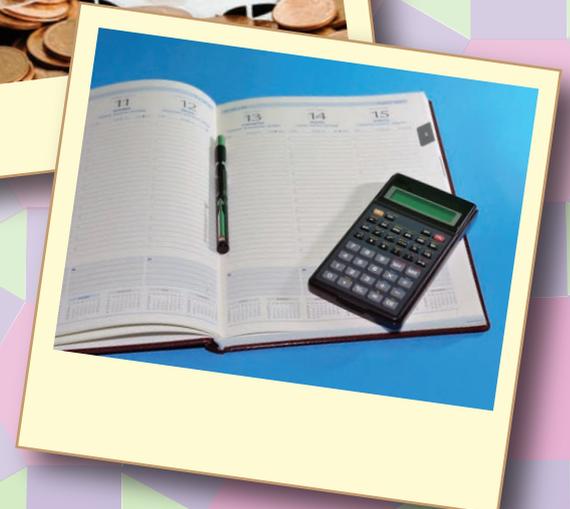
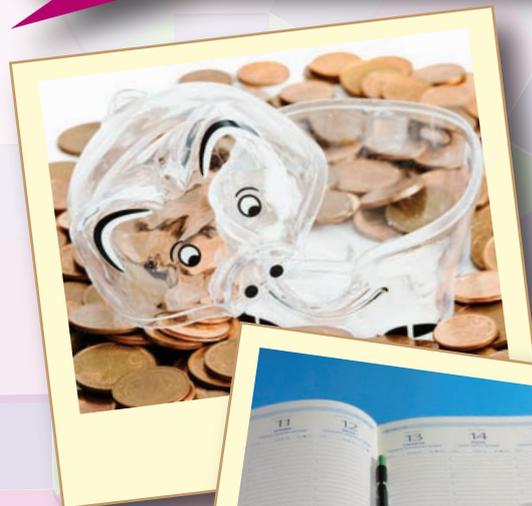
- ✓ The tendered price of the routine maintenance contract represents a cost saving of 6.67% per annum over the life of the contract compared against the previous contract.
- ✓ The tendered price of the gas repairs and servicing contract represents a cost saving of 2.1% per annum over the life of the contract compared against the previous contract.
- ✓ The tendered price of the external and internal (communal) painting contract represents a cost saving of 3.9% per annum over the life of the contract compared against the previous contract.
- ✓ The review and subsequent renegotiation of the ground maintenance contract has resulted in further years work being awarded to the incumbent contractor with no annual inflationary increase to cost.
- ✓ The review and subsequent renegotiation of the communal area cleaning contract has resulted in a further years work being awarded to the incumbent contractor with an increase to cost of that is 0.3% below the rate of inflation.

## Highlights 2013/14

We continue to publish information regarding our Value for Money savings in our quarterly newsletter and Annual Report to Tenants. Our Value for Money Statement is also published on our website.

Tenants have been involved in setting the five-year planned-maintenance programme and have had a say as to where Unity should spend the budget available.

Our Tenant Panel continues to review the services Unity and our contractors provide to ensure tenants are getting good value.



# Value for Money Initiatives

## Financial Inclusion Officers

- ✓ New posts have delivered £58k savings over 2012/13 and 2013/14

## Landscaping Standstill Costs

- ✓ This is the fifth year that our landscaping costs have stayed the same

## Key Performance Targets

- ✓ We maintained a tight grip on voids, keeping our results well below our 2% target in 2013/14

## Local Enterprise Initiatives

- ✓ We negotiated a further 99 year lease for Chapeltown Enterprise Centre.
- ✓ We secured a £1,100k grant from Leeds City Council and ERDF securing financial security for Unity Enterprise in the medium to long term.

## Re-tendering

- ✓ We achieved contract savings of over £24k in 2013/14 and annual savings of £512k in the five previous years.
- ✓ Savings of £847k will be achieved over the life of the contracts.

## Robust Financial Performance

- ✓ In 2012/13 we recorded a surplus of £959k against a target of £453k
- ✓ In 2013/14 we recorded a surplus of £1,071k against a target of £488k
- ✓ In 2012/13 our gearing was 32% against a target of 30% and in 2013/14 it was 42%
- ✓ In 2012/13 interest cover was 439% against a target of 350% and in 2013/14 it was 417%

## Development

- ✓ We delivered 78 new homes and acquired and brought back into use 13 homes as part of the 2008-2011 National Affordable Homes Programme (NAHP)
- ✓ We are building 86 new homes as part of the 2011-15 Affordable Homes Programme (AHP)

## Other Value for Money Savings

- ✓ We continue to look for cost savings and we use our VFM log record these
- ✓ Since March 2012 we made savings of well over £200,000.

## I'd like more detail...

If you'd like some more detail about our performance and our plans for the future, please visit [unityha.co.uk](http://unityha.co.uk) and download a copy of our Self-Assessment (in the publications page) or call 0113 200 7751 and request a copy to be sent to you.

### Problems understanding?

If you need any of our information translating or if you need an interpreter, please contact us. We can also provide this information in large print or on CD if you need us to.

 0113 200 7700  [uha@unityha.co.uk](mailto:uha@unityha.co.uk)

## I'd like to be involved...

Our tenants and residents are involved in monitoring our performance by means of our Tenant Panels. Our Tenant Panel also had the opportunity to decide what should be included in the 'Annual Report to Tenants'.

If you'd like to be involved in evaluating Unity's performance, if you have lots of ideas about how Unity's services could be improved or if you'd like to take part in editing the next edition of the Annual Report to Tenants we'd be very keen to hear from you. Please call Lewis on 0113 200 7751 for more information.