

# Unity News

Winter 2016



## Emergency Repairs

 0800 970 2524

## Emergency Gas Repairs

 01274 603 333

## Transco (gas leaks)

 0800 111 999

## Christmas Opening Times

**Fri 23rd December** - 9.00am - 5.00pm

**Mon 26th December** (Boxing Day) - CLOSED

**Tue 27th December** - CLOSED

**Wed 28th December** - CLOSED

**Thur 29th December** - CLOSED

**Fri 30th December** - CLOSED

**Mon 2nd January** - CLOSED

**Tue 3rd January** - 9.00am - 5.00pm

## Unity in Bloom 2016 Winners

After last year's success, Unity hosted another Unity in Bloom gardening competition. The high standard of entrants made the judging difficult, but thankfully members of our Tenant Panel dedicated 2 days to going out and judging this year's entries. With 3 more categories in this year's competition compared to last year, more tenants were able to take home a luxury prize.

(The story continues on page 12)

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Reminder that rent is a priority during the winter months, with tips on how to save money!

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Cheap, delicious meals to keep you warm over winter.

### 7. Have you got a problem with damp?

Tips on how to deal with condensation during the cold weather.

### 8. Tenancy HEALTH checks

New procedure to gain information about tenants and build relationships with Housing Officers.

### 9. What languages can staff speak?

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### 10. How to leave you home

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Avoid being caught out by 'no win no fee' claims

### 12. Unity in Bloom 2016

See the winners from this year's gardening competition.

### 15. AGM

Details from Unity's 2016 AGM. We were joined by Lord Kamlesh Patel MP and the cricket club from the Vatican.

## Messages



## Unity in the Community: Christmas Appeals

### Leeds North and West Foodbank



Every day people in the UK go hungry for reasons ranging from redundancy to receiving an unexpected bill on a low income. A simple box of food makes a big difference, with foodbanks helping prevent crime, housing loss, family breakdown and mental health problems. In 2015/16, The Trussell Trust's Foodbank Network provided

1,109,309 three-day emergency food supplies and support to UK people in crisis. Of these, over 400,000 went to children.

As part of our Christmas appeal this year, we did a collection in order to help our local foodbank provide necessary support to residents who require it. We already work closely with Leeds North and West in assisting some of our tenants, however this year we have increased our involvement and raised donations in order to provide food for hundreds of Leeds residents who will have to access the food bank over the Christmas period.

### Cash for Kids: Mission Christmas

We were a donation centre for Cash for Kids: Mission Christmas campaign this year. We collected any unopened toys that could be given to a child, who would otherwise receive nothing at Christmas. Last year, Cash for Kids provided over 22,000 children in Leeds with toys on Christmas day.



For more information, please visit: <http://www.radioaire.co.uk/charity/mission-christmas/>

### Help the homeless this winter



Real Change and Leeds Homeless Partnership are working together to operate a weekly outreach in Leeds City Centre every Sunday at 6.30pm. They provide warm meals and

equipment to homeless people in the area. This year there will be over 3,000 people in Leeds who are homeless and need help.

They urgently need donations:

**Food**  
**Clothing**

**Tents**  
**Sleeping Bags**

**#REALCHANGE**

## Make paying rent easier

The allpay App is a FREE mobile application (App) available to download for your Apple or Android smartphone that enables you to pay your bills quickly and easily at the touch of a button. The app will securely store your rent and card details, allowing you to pay anytime!

## How to download

- ✓ Search for 'allpay' in the Apple App Store, Windows Phone Store or Google Play.
- ✓ Click on the allpay logo and download the Payment App for FREE.



## Congratulations!

to Mrs A, Meanwood who is the winner of the £50 repairs satisfaction survey prize draw!

## Unity retains Investors in People and Customer Service Excellence

As Unity has been accredited with Customer Service Excellence and Investors in People, we must have supervised visits to ensure that we are maintaining the desired standard and fulfilling their expectations. We recently had our supervision visits for both awards, please read below to find out more:

### Customer Service Excellence

Customer Service Excellence aims to bring professional, high-level customer service concepts into common practice with every customer service by offering a unique improvement tool to help those delivering services put their customers at the core of what they do.

The assessor observed every area of the business from the reception desk, to repairs and maintenance and to complaints handling. He also interviewed the Tenant Panel to ask them about the opportunities they have had to influence and shape service delivery. Following this visit from an independent assessor, Unity retained the Customer Service Excellence Award for a third year running.

**CUSTOMER SERVICE EXCELLENCE**



### Investors in People

Investors in People is an institution that sets the standard for better people management within organisations. Their internationally recognised accreditation is held by 14,000 organisations across the world. The Standard defines what it takes to lead, support and manage people well for sustainable results.

As we had achieved our Silver Standard last year, this year was a supervision visit that ensured we are still achieving the set standard. At this visit the assessor had a meeting with all of our management staff to ensure that improvements had been made since the previous trip and that progress had been made. The assessor was satisfied with our progress and we maintained our accreditation.



## A message from our Income Management Team

In **December 2015** there were **579 households** in arrears, the average debt was **£559**, the total debt was **£323,210**.

This average debt is equivalent to denying two households a new shower each, or one household a new front door, for each debt case. The total debt is equivalent to denying 75 households a new kitchen.

It is important that rent is paid and arrears are cleared, all year round, so that Unity can maintain the best service possible for its tenants, and so that you are not denying yourself or someone else that service.

### The Cost of Debt

If Unity is forced to go to court for a breach of your tenancy, including not paying rent and arrears, **Unity will recover the cost of this from you.**

These costs can be **£325** to go to court the first time, **£100** to apply for permission to seek a warrant for possession, **£121** to execute a warrant for possession, and these costs will be incurred each time we have to repeat this or any part of the legal process. Furthermore you will have to pay to appeal any court decision. In short going into arrears can cost you **at least a further £546**

#### Russell Sergeant

Income  
Management  
Officer

☎ 0113 200 7752

#### Clive Greenwood

Income  
Management  
Team Leader

☎ 0113 200 7753

#### Sam Mnyama

Income  
Management  
Officer

☎ 0113 200 7737

#### Matthew Hull

Income  
Management  
Officer

☎ 0113 200 7733

of costs, and possibly more.

### Welfare Reform Update

The Benefit Cap has been lowered to **£384.62 p/w in Leeds**. This means that if your household gets unemployment benefits, Child Benefit and housing benefit which total more than £384.62 you will get less housing benefit. If Unity, Leeds Benefit Service or the DWP notify you that you are affected, **contact us for advice.**

You may be able to get help through **Discretionary Housing Payments**. In most cases however you will have to look at your budget and work out what you can spend less money on. This is because rent has to be a priority payment and paid first. Unity's advice to all tenants is that you prepare for the future and budget carefully, ensure that you save at least a little so that if something unfortunate happens in the future.

Talk to **Unity's Employment Service** to see if they can help you beat the benefits trap by finding work.

**Universal Credit** - In the application you must answer that you pay rent (any housing benefit will stop) or you will not get any money for your rent. Tell us that you have applied for Universal Credit and we can give you all your tenancy details so you can claim for housing benefit correctly in your Universal Credit claim.



# Remember to pay rent over Christmas

## Don't fall into arrears this winter

We know that Christmas is an expensive time and puts a lot of pressure on your bank account. However, we must remind you that you must **continue to pay your rent** as normal, even if this means reducing what you spend on Christmas.

If you think you will struggle before or during Christmas, our **Income Management Team** can refer you to budgeting, benefit and debt advice as well as suggest alternative payment plans or ways to pay the rent.

By working with with our Income Management Team, tenants have managed to reduce their money owed to Unity over the past year. In 2015/16 we have reduced our rent arrears cases by **52** and the debt figure has been reduced by **£17,552**.

Unfortunately, in 2017 it could be even more challenging for households to make ends meet, due to **further benefit cuts**, so being careful over Christmas could put you in a much better position for the new year.

If you're worried about paying your rent over winter, give us a call: **0113 200 7700**

Here are some ideas to make your money go further over the festive season:



Make yourself familiar with **voucher code websites**, such as [vouchercode.co.uk](http://vouchercode.co.uk) and Group On.



**Use price comparison websites** to ensure that you're getting the best savings possible on your shopping. Sites such as PriceRunner, Quidco and [mysupermarket.co.uk](http://mysupermarket.co.uk) can all help you get the best price.



**Think twice before borrowing money.** Make sure you don't find yourself borrowing more than you can afford to pay back. It is important to evaluate who you are borrowing from and what you will be repaying back in total.



**Hold off until the sales!** Following the Christmas rush, retailers usually slash the prices of their goods which could save you a lot of money. TV's, consoles, clothes can be available cheaper if you wait until after Christmas Day.



**TOP TIP!**  
Regularly check [moneysavingexpert.com](http://moneysavingexpert.com) for tips and offers that can help you save money!

# Think you have a problem with damp? You may have a problem with condensation

One of the most common complaints Unity receives from people living in our properties is about 'damp', when in fact the problem is caused by condensation.

This tends to be more of a problem in our new-build houses which are equipped with energy saving features which prevent heat loss, but at the same time can prevent moisture from escaping.

Condensation occurs when warm, moist air hits a cold surface. It is common in bathrooms where hot water makes the atmosphere steamy, but it can affect other rooms as well.

Take a look at some examples of condensation that were found in some of Unity's properties:



Steamy windows, black mould around window frames or on the backs of curtains?

Raised or peeling wallpaper?



**You probably have a problem with condensation!**

## How to avoid condensation

- ✓ After a bath or shower, open a window and close the bathroom door
- ✓ Dry clothes outdoors or in dryer. If drying clothes indoors, open a window in that room and shut the door
- ✓ Never block, stuff or cover air bricks. You will almost certainly have problems with condensation if you do
- ✓ Never place wet clothes directly on radiators as moisture seeps straight into the walls behind it.
- ✓ Black mould feeds on residues from shampoos and soaps. Make sure that you clean the tiling, grouting and sealant in your bathroom at least once a fortnight
- ✓ Treat mould as soon as you see it to prevent it from spreading
- ✓ Don't push furniture against walls. Leave a gap for at least 5cm for warm air to get to the walls
- ✓ If you're doing something steamy (such as cooking, or ironing) shut the door, use an extractor fan or open a window
- ✓ It's better to keep your heating on lower for longer, rather than higher for a short-time.

## Unity's Handyman Service

£10 per hour



Need a little job doing but don't know anyone who can do it for you? Unity's Handyperson, Antony Wilson, is available for hire for small jobs, like fitting a curtain rail, felting a shed roof or putting together flat-pack furniture.

☎ 0113 200 7708

✉ [antony.wilson@unityha.co.uk](mailto:antony.wilson@unityha.co.uk)

# Tenancy HEALTH Checks

## Have you had your visit?

### What are Tenancy HEALTH Checks?

Tenancy HEALTH checks involve our Housing Officers visiting you in your home and having a conversation and evaluation of your property. Although the Officers already visit each estate four times over the year, the HEALTH checks will include **speaking to every single tenant** and ensuring that their individual needs are being met by Unity. The Housing Officers will be tasked with visiting every tenancy **every two years**, the equivalent of approximately **23 visits per month per officer**. The HEALTH checks give us an opportunity to **improve communication** between Housing Officers and tenants. It also provides tenants with a chance to report any issues with their homes or neighbourhoods, while giving our Officers insight into how the tenant is treating their home.

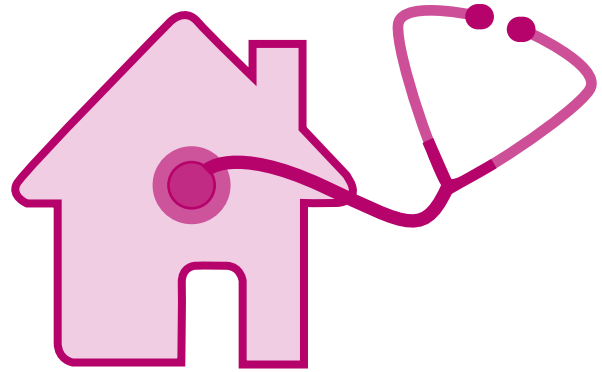


Housing Officers, Kamila and Rashpal, will be conducting the HEALTH checks. If you're unsure about who your Housing Officer is, give us a call: **0113 200 7700**

### Why are we doing them?

A number of tenants have informed Unity that they feel that there is a lack of presence from the Housing Officers within their communities. The Housing Officers are currently visiting every area **four times a year** through the estate visit programme. Some tenants feel that Housing Officers are not communicating enough with them in regards to issues/concerns that they have raised. Most communication is done by letter and phone and so we want to increase face to face

contact with residents. In order to increase the engagement that Housing Officers have with tenants, we have started to conduct Tenancy HEALTH Checks.



### What does HEALTH stand for?



#### Housing Condition

An assessment on the condition of your home.



#### Environment

Check on the condition of the gardens and communal areas.



#### Attitude/Culture

Adherence to the tenancy agreement, rent payments, reporting repairs etc.



#### Lifestyle

Ensuring that the property isn't suffering, such as condensation due to lifestyle.



#### Tenancy Enforcement/Adherence

Good neighbour agreement. Make sure there are no issues with Anti Social Behaviour.



#### Overall Health

Advice on other services such as Employment/Tenant Involvement along with any other tenant concerns.

One of the main benefits that we aim to achieve from our visits is a better overall communication between Unity and our tenants. The information/advice collected/given will link in to all departments within the organisation with emphasis on income management, repairs and employment services. It will allow for housing officers to have a greater understanding of our tenants' needs.

### Outcomes for our visits include:

- ✓ Greater knowledge and up to date info on tenants.
- ✓ Increased presence on estates and communication with residents.
- ✓ Earlier identification of vulnerable tenants and appropriate action taken.
- ✓ A reduction in repair costs and improved condition of assets.



**You will be contacted by your Housing Officer prior to your HEALTH check**

## What languages can Unity staff speak?

We acknowledge and appreciate that not all of our tenants are confident in speaking English. Unity staff are very patient in communicating with tenants and ensuring that information is given in the clearest way possible. However, if you really lack confidence with English, some of our staff can speak other languages. They would be more than happy to help if you struggle communicating with staff. Here are the different languages that our staff members can speak:

### ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages)

If you or someone you know really struggles with English skills, there's no need to worry. Our Employment Services Team now run **FREE ESOL classes** every week. The course helps to develop confidence when speaking and reading in English. The sessions take place on **Thursdays PM and Fridays AM**.

If you want some more information, or would like to book a place, contact our team today:  
**0113 200 7746 or 0113 200 7738**

Hindi

Punjabi

Bengali

Urdu

Zulu

Shona

Mirpiri



# How to leave your home

## Best practice to save Unity time and money

Moving home is a stressful time; thinking about packing up your things, taking final meter readings and arranging removal services. However, there have been a number of cases where tenants have left their home in a very unclean state, which has cost Unity a vast amount of money to clean up. We also end up losing more due to a loss of rent for the time spent cleaning instead of moving somebody in. In order to prevent this from happening, We remind tenants that if they would like to leave our properties, or transfer to another Unity property, that their home must be left spotless to make the process go a lot quicker.

### Once your tenancy ends you must leave your home:

- Empty
- Secure
- Tidy
- With fixtures and fittings (i.e. kitchen cupboards, etc) in a good condition

It's important to leave the property tidy, if you leave anything inside (belongings or rubbish) we will get rid of it but you will be charged for the cleanup service. When you leave your home, you must ensure the property is empty.

### In the weeks before you move out:

- Make sure the property is clean
- Remove all rubbish and personal possessions from the property including sheds/garages and lofts.
- Organise collection and disposal of large unwanted items by Leeds City Council
- Make sure you pay off any rent owed.

### On the day you move out:

- Do one final clean up and check the property is in a good condition, with all rubbish and unwanted items removed.

**The longer that it takes for us to clean and prepare the property, the longer the new tenant has to wait for their new home.**  
**This isn't fair and will not be tolerated.**  
**Leave the property at a standard you would expect from a new home!**

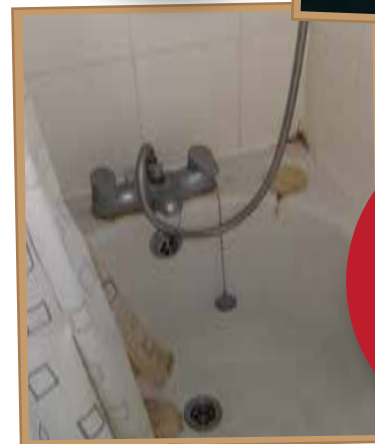
## Examples of bad practice



Don't leave any locks on doors. You could be charged for a new door.



Remove all rubbish from the property and clean up any mess that you have made.



Make sure all surfaces are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected, including skirting boards & bannisters.



Clean and tend to condensation within the property (see page 7)

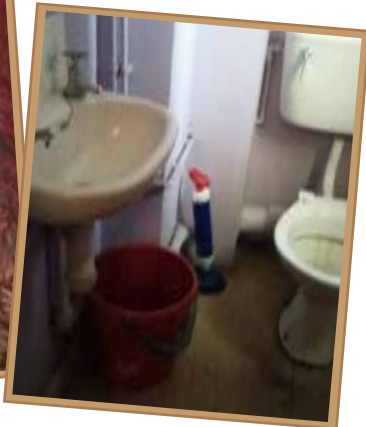
## Case Study - Unity Property, East Leeds



**✗ Poor Practice**

Cost of repairs/cleaning and safety checks for the property - **£6725**

Weeks it took to complete and rent - **8**



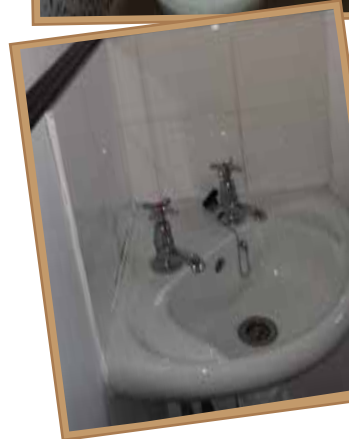
## Case Study - Unity Property, North Leeds



**✓ Unity Standard**

Cost of repairs/cleaning and safety checks for the property - **£250**

Weeks it took to complete and rent - **2**



**If you cause any form of damage or leave the property in poor condition, you will be charged.**

## Disrepair Claims

There has recently been an increase in companies canvassing social housing tenants across the Leeds area with regard to outstanding repairs. These companies claim that tenants may be entitled to thousands of pounds in compensation due to their landlords not undertaking repairs. This is very rarely the case. Unity takes its responsibility as a landlord very seriously and as a consequence we will defend any claims made against us to the fullest extent possible including making our case in court where necessary. **Since 2008 we have successfully defended 95% of any claims made against us.**

While the companies that make the claim on behalf of the tenant may work on a no win no fee basis this does not include our costs and we will, where we are successful in defending ourselves, claim any cost we have incurred from the tenant who has instigated the action. This could be thousands of pounds. We are also aware of a number of instances where tenants who have decided not to continue with claims when they

realise that they will have to appear personally in court, have subsequently found themselves being chased for costs by the company acting for them.



**= £££'s**

We know that sometimes things go wrong when we are undertaking repairs and we also understand how frustrating this can be for you. However, any cost that we incur due to legal claims comes from our repairs budget and this reduces our ability to undertake planned maintenance such as kitchen and bathroom renewals.

**If you feel you have a problem with a repair please speak to our customer services team, your housing officer or our maintenance staff who will always do their best to help you and to resolve the matter.**

# Unity in Bloom 2016

## The winners revealed...



Following the success of last year's competition, Unity hosted another Unity in Bloom gardening competition. The competition involves Unity tenants nominating their garden into the most relevant category, which our Judging Panel (made up of the Tenant Panel) then mark against a particular criteria. Due to the variety of gardens that entered last year, we added three new categories into this year's competition making the chance of winning even greater! This year we added: Most Eco-Friendly Garden, Runner Up Most-Eco Friendly Garden, and Best Small Garden. The standard of entry was very impressive and Unity would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the tenants who entered this year's competition. We would also like to thank the Judging Panel, who dedicated two days of their time to judge the gardens.

Take a look at the 2016 winners:

## Best Small Garden

A lovely use of space with a delightful variation of colours. This garden combined flowers and furniture wonderfully which resulted in a very impressive and deserving winner!



Ms B,  
Woodhouse

# Best Plants and Foliage

This garden offered a wide range of bright, colourful flowers and plants elegantly spread and combined. The effort and attention put into its appearance was obvious and resulted in a thoroughly stunning garden.



Mrs M,  
Chapel Allerton

# Best Fruit & Veg Garden

Mr & Mrs L,  
Harehills

A very thoughtful and devoted garden that was rammed with a wide range of fruit and vegetables that the tenants share with their family and neighbours!



# Runner-Up Most Eco-Friendly

A very close contest for the Most Eco-Friendly garden in this year's competition with the runner-up a very committed space that is ideal for animals. They even host and look after hedgehogs and use recycled resources around the garden!



Ms S & Ms C,  
Crossgates



# Most Eco-Friendly

This immaculate garden was wonderfully crafted and maintained. A lot of hard work is put into the upkeep of such a wonderfully arranged area. It is even equipped with a delightful pond, as pictured below.



Mr B & Ms B,  
Crossgates

## Could you be a 2017 winner?

Unity would like to send congratulations to all of the winners in this year's competition and thank everyone who took part. The effort made by tenants to maintain their gardens and take pride in their homes is something that Unity encourages and appreciates. Next year Unity in Bloom will be returning with the same categories. By entering the competition you are in with a chance of

winning vouchers that you could spend on whatever you please! It also acts as encouragement to spend a bit more time on your gardens. Gardens are tenants responsibilities to maintain, and Unity in Bloom gives you a chance to be rewarded for your hard work!

If you would like to enter next year's competition, please contact Nathan at **0113 200 7751** or email [nathan.dale@unityha.co.uk](mailto:nathan.dale@unityha.co.uk)

# AGM 2016

## Unity celebrates another successful year



Homes & Enterprise

Supporting BME Communities  
and Multi-Cultural Neighbourhoods

This year Unity celebrated its 29th Annual General Meeting, looking back on what has been a very successful and proud year for the organisation. The AGM took place at the legendary Headingley Cricket Club, where we were joined by the Chief Executive of Yorkshire Cricket, Mark Arthur, who delivered a speech which addressed the positive influence that cricket, and sport, can have on communities and development.

Following the arrival of board members, tenants and guests, our Chair of Board, Shruti Bhargava, and Chief Executive, Ali Akbor, led the meeting and began to dissect the progress that has been made this year as well as commenting on the future struggles that Unity may face in the coming year. Unity continues to be a thriving housing association and despite the cuts facing the housing industries, we have not had to make any redundancies nor lose any services provided.



Our key note speaker at the event was Lord Kamlesh Patel OBE of Bradford, who produced a speech focusing on the changing landscapes of BME communities and how housing associations can adapt to them. Lord Patel MP is very active within Bradford and chairs numerous different charitable organisations and has authored a number of national reports including The Patel Report into Prison Drug Treatment.



After the formalities of the AGM came to an end, we were treated to an inter-faith cricket match for the Sir John Major Friendship Cup. Unity co-sponsored the match which saw the Batley Cricket Club, a predominately Muslim team, and the St Peters XI of the Pontifical Council for Culture, a cricket club from the Vatican made up of priests. The friendly contest was part of the St Peters XI UK tour which has seen them play in the most famous cricket grounds the UK has to offer. Unity was very proud to sponsor such a symbolic contest and would like to congratulate Batley Cricket Club on their 1 point victory!



## 2015/16 Annual Report available for download!

If you're interested in reading about Unity's past year, our annual report is now available on our website.

Download a copy by visiting [unityha.co.uk](http://unityha.co.uk) and going to the 'Publications' page. If you'd like a hard copy, please request one by giving us a call or visiting our office.



Keep an eye out for our Annual Report for Tenants which is due to be published in the coming weeks.

## Contacting Unity

**T:** 0113 200 7700

**E:** [uha@unityha.co.uk](mailto:uha@unityha.co.uk)

**W:** [www.unityha.co.uk](http://www.unityha.co.uk)

### Office Hours:

Monday: 9am - 5pm

Tuesday: 9am - 5pm

Wednesday: 10am - 5pm

Thursday: 9am - 5pm

Friday: 9am - 5pm

If you have an emergency repair when the office is shut, please ring our emergency repairs number (see below). If we have to change our emergency repairs number for any reason you can get the new one by phoning 0113 200 7700 and listening to the message.

**Emergency Repairs**  0800 970 2524

e.g. serious floods and leaks, total loss of water and electricity, the only toilet is blocked.

**Emergency Gas Repairs**  01274 603 333

e.g. total heating or hot water failure when Unity's office is closed the next day.

**Transco (gas leaks)**  0800 111 999

**Repairs by email:** [repairs@unityha.co.uk](mailto:repairs@unityha.co.uk)

For information at your fingertips, visit our website at [www.unityha.co.uk](http://www.unityha.co.uk) for leaflets, latest news and community information.


For comments and suggestions about this newsletter please contact Nathan Dale on **0113 200 7751** or email [nathan.dale@unityha.co.uk](mailto:nathan.dale@unityha.co.uk)

## Leeds City Council Services

### Adult Social Care

 0113 222 4401

### Anti-Social Behaviour

 0113 222 4402

 [onestop@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:onestop@leeds.gov.uk)

### Children Social Care

 0113 222 4403

### Council tax and housing benefit

 0113 222 4404

 [lcc.benefits@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:lcc.benefits@leeds.gov.uk)

### Complaints and compliments

 0113 222 4405

### Environmental health

Contact the Council's environmental services to get bulky items taken away for free.

 0113 222 4406

 [refusecollection@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:refusecollection@leeds.gov.uk)

### Roads and pavements

 0113 222 4407

 [highways@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:highways@leeds.gov.uk)

### Registrars

 0113 222 4408

### Planning

 0113 222 4409

### Minicom

 0113 222 4410



## 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.