

# Annual Report to Tenants 2017/18



**Unity**  
Homes & Enterprise

Supporting BME Communities  
and Multi-Cultural Neighbourhoods

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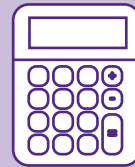
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# A message from our CEO & Chair of the Board...

Last year we were delighted that the Lord Mayor of Leeds, Councillor Jane Dowson, was one of the guest speakers at our AGM. After celebrating our 30th anniversary in such excellent fashion there was, perhaps, a danger that this year could have been a case of, 'after the Lord Mayor's Show'. That certainly hasn't been the case as, over the past twelve months, Unity has made significant advances on every front.

Our key strategic role is to increase affordable housing to overcome the current housing crisis. We're pleased to report that we've done just that, with a further 58 completions in our affordable homes development programme, all of which are fully let.

The need for new homes has never been greater. A report by the Rowntree Foundation warns that, by 2022, the shortage of housing will be equivalent to a city the size of Leeds. We are playing our part in preventing that. In that respect Unity punches well above its weight, making a significant contribution to local housing. In our quest to meet our objectives we have added Kirklees to the areas where Unity has a presence.

As Unity has grown, so have our services. We are – and have been for a number of years -- much more than regeneration experts and provider of affordable homes. Our work extends to many areas as we work towards another of our goals – the creation of sustainable communities.

Unity Enterprise, which celebrates 20 years within the Unity Group in 2018, is a good example. As well as offering local businesses affordable, quality workspace, Unity Enterprise also nurture them. The launch of the Business Incubator was another major advance in the services we provide to help local enterprise thrive and grow. Through Unity Employment Services we work with tenants and local people to give them the skills they need to become attractive to employers and then help them find work. Over 250 people have benefited from this service over the past year.

Operationally Unity has also enjoyed success. Most importantly our activities generated a surplus of £1.9m which, as a not for profit business, will be reinvested; building new homes, improving existing ones and supporting our added value tenant services.

During the year we engaged a new repairs and maintenance contractor, GTD. We felt it important that tenants were involved in their selection. GTD have made a great start and our Housing Management team are looking forward to developing a close working relationship with them and in turn an even better service to tenants.

Unity's success as both landlord and developer continues to raise our profile on the national stage. We were delighted to welcome Alok Sharma (Housing Minister at the time of his visit) who came to meet a number of our tenants. Leeds West MP, Rachel Reeves paid a visit to our Whyther Park development, which is of course, in her constituency. We also welcomed back Lord Mayor of Leeds, Councillor Jane Dowson, to open the Business Incubator at the Unity Business Centre.

Of course none of what we've achieved over the past year would be possible without the partners mentioned throughout this report. Key are Leeds City Council, Kirklees Council and the Homes & Communities Agency (now Homes England). It's an arrangement that works for the good of all. They have confidence in Unity's strategic vision and we deliver on what we promise – with impressive results.

**Shruti Bhargava** - Chair of the Board

**Ali Akbor** - Chief Executive



# Tenancy Standard



**99.78%**

of income was collected

**0.77%**

of rent was lost due to voids

**25**

average amount of days taken to re-let a property

**87%**

of new tenants would recommend Unity

## Highlights

Unity has a very low stock turnover - just 5.2% compared to a national average of 10%. This speaks volumes about the quality of our properties and lettings service.

Our firm but fair approach to rent collection resulted in a further reduction in arrears - for the fourth year in succession.

As Universal Credit approaches, we will be recruiting a new Housing Officer to increase time spent on estates and helping tenants in need.

New Unity tenants gave us a 99% approval rating on the standard of their home. Of the tenants who moved on this year, 93% said they were satisfied with our service.

We continue to work with other key organisations in the area, such as Feel Good Factor and Leeds Black Elders, to provide support and advice to tenants.

A tenant wide Census is set to take place to update tenant records and ensure that we know who is currently living in our properties.

# Home Standard



**97.2%**

of tenants were satisfied with their repairs

**362**

gas safety tests were completed

**100%**

properties have live gas safety certification

**8.9**

average number of days to complete a repair

## Highlights

Following Health & Safety fire risk assessments, we completed upgrades at 13 of our communal properties to meet all aspects of current legislation.

Direct purchasing of materials enabled us to cut costs and, as a result, we were able to complete a higher number of improvements than planned.

After a thorough procurement process, and the help from our tenants, Unity appointed a new repairs and maintenance contractor, GTD (Guaranteed To Deliver).

Unity invested £796,000 with 70 homes benefiting from new energy efficient boilers, 64 had new kitchens fitted and 15 new window frames.

Gas servicing was completed at all Unity properties. We also have an outgoing programme of electrical tests on all properties. A further 362 will be completed in 2017/18.

Overall customer satisfaction rates increased to 97%, ahead of the 95% target. Forrest, our outgoing contractors, delivered 6.5 years of great service, for which we thank them.

# Neighbourhood & Community Standard



**58**

new homes  
have been  
developed

**110**

people helped into  
employment

**177**

people trained their  
skills and improved  
employability

**106**

more homes due to  
be built by March  
2021

## Highlights

Unity has completed 58 new homes with a further 106 properties ready to go until our Affordable Homes Programme is complete

During the past year Unity's Employment Services has helped: 177 people improve their skills and employability through training, 30 people find voluntary work & 110 people find work

UES likes to find work for clients on Unity's own development sites. As a result 6 clients were employed at Lenhurst Avenue in Leeds & Quarmby Road in Huddersfield.

Housing Minister, Alok Sharma, visited a number of our new developments to see the progress of our Affordable Homes Programme.

UES embarked on a pilot project, visiting the homes of in excess of 500 tenants to talk to them about employment prospects and welfare changes, offering further assistance.

Unity Business Centre's value for money offering continues to be extremely popular with good rates of tenant retention and 100% occupancy over the past year.

# Affordable Homes Programme

## Completed developments

### Parkwood Road (Phase Two)

In addition to the 18 houses already built at Phase One of Parkwood Road at the beginning of 2017, phase two added an extra 6 houses. The development was completed in June 2017 and is now fully occupied with tenants.



### 146 Chapeltown Road

The property is a typical stone built Victorian terraced family home situated within the Chapeltown Conservation Area. When we started the project the poor state of the derelict building meant that only the property's front façade could be retained. A thoughtfully designed extension has created six spacious apartments. Working with the trustees of the property next door, and part-financed by the Heritage Lottery Fund, it has taken seven years from inception to completion and the property is now fully let.

## Upcoming developments

### Whyther Park, Armley

Formerly the Ancestor Arms, a public house, the land was purchased by Leeds City Council and, following competitive marketing, Unity was chosen as the preferred developer. Due for completion in **December 2018**, the development will comprise eight flats and six houses. **Esh Construction** are our construction partners.

### Leopold Street, Chapeltown

Using derelict land, this **£4.1m development** is in Unity's heartland, across the road from our offices. Working in conjunction with **Chapeltown CoHousing Group – ChaCo** for short – when completed in **December 2019** it will provide 30, one and two bedroom properties, for the over-55s to be owned and managed by Unity and 34 flats & houses to be owned by ChaCo. The contractors for this project are **Starfish Construction**.

### Quarmby Road, Huddersfield

Unity added Kirklees to our property portfolio a couple of years ago. Our contractors, **Jack Lunn**, started work on the site in 2018. Completion of the **nine houses** is due in **December 2018**.

### Beckhill Grove, Meanwood

A **£4.8m investment**, this major development will add **30, two and three bed, homes** to meet local housing needs. They will complement the 125 homes Unity already owns and manages on the Stonegate Estate in Meanwood. **Esh Construction** are our chosen contractors. Completion is due on **December 2019**.

### Leeds Road, Kippax

Strategic Team Construction Group had an option on the site (owned by Leeds City Council) and offered Unity a land and works package to build **23 houses and flats** for Affordable Rent. The project is valued at **£3.1m** and completion due in **December 2019**.

# Unity Enterprise

## Unity Business Centre

The most important development at the UBC over the past year has been the launch of the Business Incubator. A joint venture with our tenants Iota Business, an accounting and book keeping practice, the Business Incubator offers fledgling businesses a perfect package to get them off the ground.

## Chapeltown Enterprise Centre

Our competitive rents continue to give us a leading edge over the competition. As a result, the Centre has also enjoyed 100% occupancy rate during the year. Again we regard ourselves as more than just a landlord, working closely with Chapeltown Development Trust (CDT) to nurture and sustain new businesses in the area.

## Leeds Media Centre

LMC is in direct competition with City Centre office accommodation. However the availability of plentiful free parking – and our excellent product offer – ensures we both win and retain tenants. Other tenants include a restaurant, a firm of solicitors and the national charity, St Giles Trust, has its Leeds office at the Media Centre.



## Unity's Employment Services

Unity's Employment Services team was set up in May 2011 to support Unity tenants and the communities in which they live to get back into employment and training. Since they joined Unity they have helped hundreds of people! Wherever possible, UES likes to find work for clients on Unity's own development sites. As a result six clients were employed at Lenhurst Avenue in Leeds and Quarmby Road in Huddersfield. UES also promotes work and training opportunities in other sectors which, over the past year has included the rail industry, nursing, retail and the police.

### Pilot progress!

It's been a long time coming, but Welfare Reform will be affecting all our tenants in the not too distant future. Ensuring they are fully prepared for these major changes is essential.

During the year we embarked on a pilot project, visiting the homes of in excess of **500 tenants** to talk to them about employment prospects and welfare changes, offering further assistance.

Work is still ongoing in Harehills and Meanwood with further visits planned in 2018 in Little London, Woodhouse, Wortley, Armley and Hunslet.

To date, as a result of this project, **around 50 tenants** requested further guidance.



### How we performed

	15/16	16/17	17/18	Total
Employment	77	95	110	282
Training	120	149	177	446
Voluntary work	15	26	30	71



# Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard



Involving members of the communities in which we work – our tenants – in the ongoing business of Unity is a key strategy. The standards of customer excellence for which we strive can only be achieved by listening to feedback and working with our tenants -- whether that is feedback through one of our forums, surveys or via our housing officers.

## Highlights

11 members of the Tenants' Group conducted a mystery shop of Unity's customer services.

Two members of the Tenants' Group were involved in the interviews during the selection of the new repairs contractor.

During the school holidays we visited our estates and organised Easter Egg hunts, gardening activities and arts & crafts days.

We attained Investors in People and Customer Service Excellence - where we received 'Compliance Plus' for our work with tenants.

Unite with Unity, our Scrutiny Panel, has reformed and is set to undertake a review of Unity's approach to anti-social behaviour.

During the year we attended Holbeck Gala and Beeston Festival. We also continued our long-standing sponsorship of Leeds West Indian Carnival which celebrated its 50th year.

## Tenants' Group

Unity's Tenants' Group remain a vital part of service improvement and involvement.

This year the regularity of Tenants' Group meetings was reviewed. They now take place bi-monthly. Members agree that a longer gap between meetings has improved their value, making the meetings more purposeful and effective. Panel members also got out and about and were involved in a number of onsite inspections on our estates.

Two of our Tenants' Group members were closely involved in the selection of our new maintenance contractors. Over a two day period they took part in interviews with the companies tendering for the work, providing feedback and opinion on each of the candidates.

## Mystery Shopping

This year, Unity's Tenants' Group chose to conduct a mystery shopping exercise to ensure that our customer services was performing at a high level. It involved eleven members of our Tenants' Group, who helped write the interview form and then made the calls to our Customer Service Team. The

good news is that our mystery shoppers found the team to be helpful and gave them 100% confidence to call back.

Using feedback from our tenant mystery shoppers, we're now looking at other ways to enhance Unity's customer experience.

## Unite with Unity

The Tenants' Scrutiny Panel has been reformed and is now back in business. Under its new guise its six member team will focus on Unity's strategy and performance.

In 2018 they will commence a major project on anti-social behaviour.

## Acting on feedback

A regular theme in feedback from tenants were requests for more activities to keep children busy during school holidays.

The tenant involvement team answered the call, organising Easter Egg hunts, gardening activities as well as arts & crafts days on a number of our estates.

## Involved in the community!



Whenever possible Unity does its best to give support and backing to local community events. During the year under review we attended Holbeck Gala and Beeston Festival. We also continued our long-standing sponsorship of Leeds West Indian Carnival which celebrated its 50th year. We were honoured to have its founder Arthur France MBE as a guest speaker at our 2017 AGM.

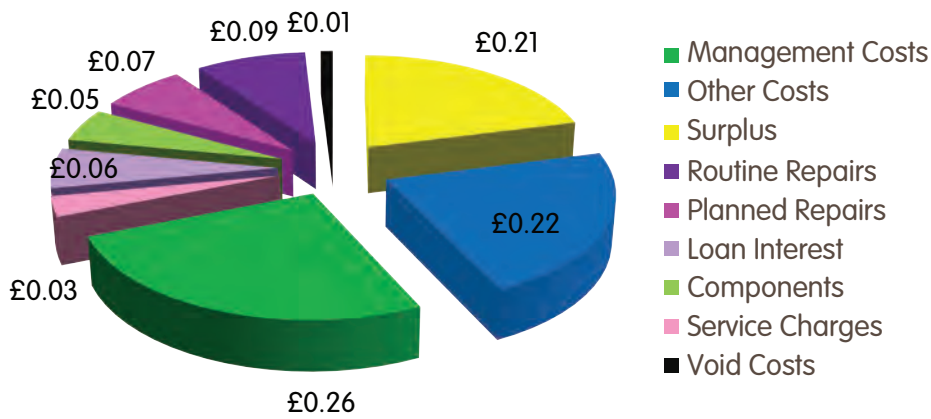
# Value for Money Standard



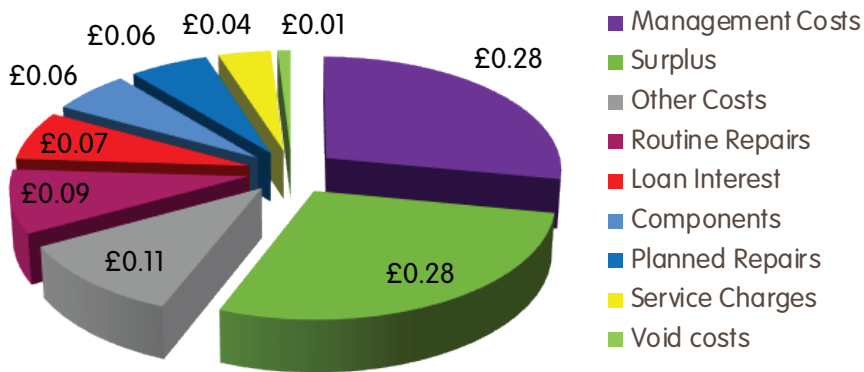
## Value for Money Log

Description	Saving	
Ensure electricity tariffs are the best available (includes all UHA communals and UPS void movements)	<b>£813</b>	annual saving
Ensure gas tariffs are the best available	<b>£3,495</b>	annual saving
Replacement programme for computer monitors to take advantage of lower price	<b>£220</b>	one-off discount
Software savings from Microsoft TT Exchange Charity Programme on ICT infrastructure upgrade	<b>£50,020</b>	one-off discount
Contract savings based on average of all tenders for new development - Ancestor Public House	<b>£121,901</b>	one-off discount
Reducing cost of annual advice (employment law) - more selective on service based on prior year requirements	<b>£600</b>	one-off discount
Siting of mobile phone mast at CEC @ £13,800pa with 3 yearly reviews and 25% paid to Leeds City Council	<b>£10,350</b>	annual saving
<b>Total Savings:</b>	<b>£187,399</b>	

## How each £1 of rent was spent in 2016/17



## How each £1 of rent was spent in 2017/18



## Financial Performance

### GROSS TURNOVER

	2017/18 Target	2017/18 Actual
Unity Housing	£6,698k	£6,962k
Unity Enterprise	£591k	£541k

### REINVESTED INTO THE COMPANY

	2017/18 Target	2017/18 Actual
Unity Housing	£1,202k	£1,933k
Unity Enterprise	£39k	£50k

Interest cover	644%	778%
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Gearing ratio	35%	36%
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Rent arrears	4.25%	4.84%
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Voids	1%	0.81%
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As a not-for-profit organisation, any money that Unity has left over at the end of the year is reinvested back into the company.

This goes towards improving services and the building of new homes.

## Your suggestions for Value for Money

If you have any ideas about how Unity could save money, we'd be very keen to hear from you. One of the ways you can tell us your ideas is by joining the Tenants' Group.

The Tenants' Group are very good at keeping an eye on how Unity spends its money and have already come up with some great suggestions. Call Nathan on **0113 200 7751** for more information.

## Want more detail?

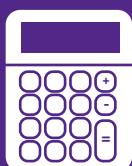
If you require any more information or clarification on anything in this report, or would like a hard copy to be sent to you, please call Nathan on **0113 200 7751**. Alternatively, you can download our 2017/18 Self-Assessment from [unityha.co.uk](http://unityha.co.uk) which has more detail.



## Governance & Viability Standard

Unity as a registered provider has to ensure it complies with all the requirements of the Homes & Communities Agency.

- Ensuring effective governance arrangements are in place
- Effective risk management, ensuring all assets are protected
- Being accountable to tenants, regulator and stakeholders



## Rent Standard

Unity charges its rents in accordance to the governments direction to the regulator.