Unity News

Spring 2016



Unity is about to embark on the largest construction programme in the company's history, adding a further 120 properties to our portfolio between now and 2018.

We have further developments planned in Beeston, Little London and Hunslet, contributing to the ongoing process of regeneration in these areas.

The building of new properties not only provides much needed affordable housing, but job opportunities for construction operatives.

In the past, many of those who have secured work placements with Unity's contractor have gone on to secure permanent roles.

Further cuts to benefits

You may be surprised to find that for the first time, perhaps ever, your rent is due to go down in April. This seems like good news, but it is worth considering whether changes to benefits might leave you out of pocket.

Universal Credit came to Leeds in February, as a result, some people will now claim Universal Credit instead of Jobseeker's Allowance. In the future, Income Support, Employment Support Allowance, Working Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit and Housing Benefit will also be phased out. (find out if you are affected on page 5).



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Welcome back Seh & Kam and a reminder of how to report repairs.

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Universal Credit was introduced to Leeds on 1st February. Find out if you will be affected and what you need to do if you are.

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Make sure that changes to Housing Benefit don't leave you out of pocket. Find out what you can do to avoid the pitfalls here.

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Find out when you are due a visit from your Housing Officer.

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See the results from the Tenant Panel's recent joint estate inspections

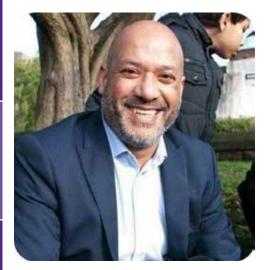
12. Building the Dream

Details of Unity's new developments and how to apply for a work opportunity in construction.

14. Gardening Galore

We are aiming to give all tenants free fruit and veg seeds and plants this year. Find out how you can get hold of some. Plus, details of the Unity in Bloom gardening competition.

Headlines



Unity Homes & Enterprise is entering 2016 with a renewed determination to deliver afforable housing, regenerate local communities and help small businesses grow.

Established in 1987 to address the needs of black and minority ethnic communities in the city, Unity's initial focus was in the Chapeltown area before extending to other parts of Leeds, including Harehills, Beeston and Holbeck.

Unity now manages almost 1,200 properties in most areas of Leeds for tenants from all communities and ethnic backgrounds. Chief Executive. Ali Akbor commented that:

In the last year we built 80 new properties and invested more than £1.3 million in home improvements.

Unity is about to start building another 120 new homes on sites across Leeds, the largest construction programme in the organisation's history (see page 12 for more details).



Supporting BME Communities and Multi-Cultural Neighbourhoods

Chief Executive of Unity, Ali Akbor – who also serves as Secretary/ Treasurer of BME National – is keen to stress that Unity is not just about providing social housing.

Our subsidiary company, Unity Enterprise, supports local entrepreneurial activity and operates three business hubs close to Leeds city centre. These include Unity Business Centre, which is now home to 80 businesses, and Leeds Media Centre where local TV station Made in Leeds has its studios.

Unity Employment Services has also been established to support Unity tenants and surrounding communities access employment and training.

Last year Unity Employment Services helped 60 people into work, delivered accredited skills training to 61 others and enabled 20 to gain work experience.

The building of new properties not only provides homes for people with particular needs and those on low incomes, it also provides job opportunities in the form of construction apprenticeships and work placements. (see page 12 for more details)

With such a large scale development programme about to begin, Unity Employment Services would be very keen to hear from anyone who would be interested in such a work opportunity.

£420 raised for Dunkirk refugees



Customer Services
Assistant, Jamila,
has been very busy
raising funds on
behalf of her
husband who
visited Dunkirk
refugee camp in
the first week of
January.

Together with a few other volunteers, they provided those in crisis with essentials such as food, tents, blankets and first aid. Kind-hearted Unity staff helped Jamila raise £210 which the organisation has matched to £420.

Tenant Panel enjoy Christmas meal!



As a token of Unity's appreciation for all the hard work that the Tenant Panel carried out last year, each member was invited to attend a Christmas meal celebration at Frankie & Benny's.

Unity wins court case saving £000s

Unity is pleased to announce that we have recently won a legal disrepair case.

From time to time, tenants take Unity to court over repairs with the hope of getting big cash compensation pay-out.

Unity will not pay compensation in cases where repairs have been completed to an adequate standard within a reasonable timescale – and you could be liable for any court costs (including our own) if you lose a court battle. By appearing in court, Unity hopes to set a precedent to any tenants considering this route.

Unity has a budget for defending ourselves in court cases, as often we will require the help of a solicitor. This is money that could be spent upgrading kitchens, bathrooms and other items in your home.

Unity boasts one of the highest levels of repairs satisfaction compared with similar organisations. However, there will be times when things go wrong – in which case please follow our complaints and compensation procedure.

Unity retains IIP Silver Standard



Unity would like to say a particular thanks to the Tenant Panel and our contractors who helped us to secure the Investors in People Silver Standard.

The Investors in People Award is an internationally recognised accreditation which signifies that we value our staff and that we 'empower and involve people', 'recognise and reward good performance' and that we 'deliver continuous improvement'.

The independent assessor was very keen to speak to staff from each department, from customer services, to repairs and

maintenance and complaints handling. She also attended a Tenant Panel meeting to find out more about tenants' opportunities to influence service delivery.

The assessor was satisfied that
Unity meets all of the criteria to
achieve the standard and in
some areas surpassed the
expectation – which is why
Unity was awarded the
Silver Standard
until 2019.



PROMISES INVESTMENT
FLEXIBLE
COMMITMENT
INTEGRITY PRIDE
RESPECT
INTEGRITY
PROMISES LEBBLE
INVESTMENT
EQUALITY RESPECT
BRIED PRIDE FLEBBLE
INTEGRITY WASSAGE

BOTH TO THE T

Congratulations!

to Miss M, Chapeltown who is the winner of the £50 repairs satisfaction survey prize draw!

Meet our Customer Services Team Ready to take your call



Supporting BME Communities and Multi-Cultural Neighbourhoods

Our Customer Services Team is trained to deal with your enquiries at the first point of contact. If you have a question regarding a repair, or your rent account, you may not need to speak to another member of staff. Contact Customer Services if:

You'd like to pay some rent using your bank card, or have an enquiry about your rent account

You need to report a repair or a problem

✓ You have any other enquiry – they will try to point you in the right direction

Emergency Repairs

If you have an emergency repair when the office is shut, please ring our emergency repairs number:

Emergency Repairs



1 0845 634 2766

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

Emergency Gas Repairs



01757 244510

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

Transco (gas leaks)



0800 111 999



Universal Credit started 1st February 2016



Supporting BME Communities and Multi-Cultural Neighbourhoods



How will you apply?

Online. The Jobcentre, Unity and Leeds City Council can help you do this, as well as offer you computer skills courses.

Are there any problems?

Unfortunately yes:

If you are used to getting benefits weekly and housing benefit paid to Unity, this will stop.

With Universal Credit you will get all your benefit paid **DIRECTLY** to you **MONTHLY**. You have to pay all your bills including rent from that monthly money. If this is a worry get budgeting help from our Income Management Team (see page 8 for more details).

UC will not be paid to you until AT LEAST 5 WEEKS after you claim it. Delays of 6 weeks or even more have been experienced by some new claimants. This means that if you are used to being paid weekly and you move on to UC you will have only one weeks money to last you five weeks.

Who will it affect?

For now it will only apply to single people who lose work after 1st February 2016 and would have applied for Job Seekers Allowance (JSA). If you are already on JSA you will not switch to Universal Cedit yet, unless you find work and lose it again.

Who will it help?

If you have just lost work, or if you are working on a low wage (less than £78 per week) and live on your own you may be able to apply for Universal Credit.

What do I need to know, when I claim?

- Your rent All tenants pay rent, even if Housing Benefit currently pays it for you.
- Service charges included in the rent find this information on the enclosed letter
- Your property address
- Number of bedrooms in the property
- Unity Housing Association's address (113-117 Chapeltown Road, LS7 3HY)

To avoid getting in to rent arrears, not being able to afford food and electric, etc., you need to start **SAVING SOME MONEY** now and every week.

If you go on to Universal Credit **TELL US**. We can help you make sure you get what you are entitled to, including UC advance payments or alternative UC payments, if you struggle in the first weeks.

You should still apply to Leeds City Council for **COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT, DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS** (for spare bedrooms and rent arrears) and LOCAL WELFARE SUPPORT (for emergencies if you run out of money).

Confused? Call 0113 200 7700

Housing Benefit changes from April 2016



Keep your claim up to date

Don't delay in claiming Housing Benefit or telling Leeds Benefit Service about any new circumstances, such as different pay or hours worked. You will only be able to backdate a claim **four weeks** and not six months anymore.

Plus if Housing Benefit has overpaid you in the past they will take the money back again, as quickly as they can.

If you are struggling to pay back a housing benefit overpayment talk to your Income Management Officer. They can help you write to housing benefit and ask that you pay back less each week.

Starting a family after 2016?

Be aware that the amount of additional Housing Benefit and Tax Credits you can claim will be less.

Planning a third child?

A family with two children who have a third child after April 2017 will not get as much additional Housing Benefit or Tax Credits for the third child.

Extended stays abroad

Leaving the country for a while? Now Housing Benefit and Pension Credits will only pay you for **one month,** then they will stop. If you go abroad for longer than one month Housing Benefit will stop.

Thinking of moving?

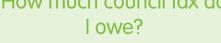
From 2016, if you move to a council or housing association property, the amount of Housing Benefit you may get will be capped, like it is for tenants of private landlords – so your rent may be more than your Housing Benefit.

Check your Housing Benefit & Council Tax account online

When is my next Housing Benefit payment due?

How much am I due?

How much council tax do I owe?



Find out online!

Type 'Housing Benefit Self Service Leeds' into Google and register for an online account today!



No more call charges

Access your account 24/7



The Benefit Cap

A new maximum to the benefits you can claim



Supporting BME Communities and Multi-Cultural Neighbourhoods

Benefits of more than £384/week?

Sometime in 2016 the total amount of out of work benefits you receive could fall. That will mean less Housing Benefit. If you receive benefits totalling more than £384, any amount above that will come off your Housing Benefit, even if it is paid direct to Unity.

Will this affect me?



If you or your partner do not work, or work a low number of hours, you may be affected.



If you have three or more children you are more likely to be affected.



But it could affect small families or even single people.

What can you do to prepare?

The main answer is to be honest with yourself and look at what you are spending every week and set yourself targets to spend less.

We know this is difficult but you may have to look at what you currently spend on your household bills, weekly shop, gas and electric, TV and internet, phones, even your children's allowance, and non-essential repayments.

Who will not be affected?



People who are older than pension credit age, unless you have a partner younger than that age.



Families that claim Working Tax Credit.



Families that claim Personal Independence Payments or Disability Living Allowance.



If you worked nearly all the year before you lost work, the cap will not apply for several months, to help you get back into work.

You may set a goal to spend £ per week less on food and the same with other bills. Then take the new smaller amount in cash to the shop. If you can stick to this you will save enough each week from shopping to cover the new bigger rent bill and other priorities.

If you know you will struggle to do this on your own our best advice is to get budgeting help. There is plenty available from our Income Management Team (details overleaf).

Introducing the Income Management Team

We now have four members of the Income Management Team including a new member of the team, Russell Sergeant, and a new Team Leader, Clive Greenwood. Advice and support is now offered by any member of the team.

We will still collect rent and arrears while supporting you to claim all the benefits you should, help you budget for your bills, guide you to debt advice, and get extra support for welfare reform changes.

Rent Letters

If you have rent arrears you may have received one of our new letters. We have simplified the letters to make them clearer and easier to understand. They tell you exactly where you are in the process and how to contact us to get help and resolve the problem. It is important that you don't ignore them.

Russell Sergeant

Income Management Officer

1 0113 200 7752

Clive Greenwood

Income Management Team Leader

1 0113 200 7753

Arrangements

We have introduced an improved way of checking that we receive all the rent payments we should. As a result we may ask you for a regular day or date to pay your rent. This is so that we know when to check you have paid.

If you cannot always pay on the same date, give us a date that you will definitely have paid by, for example the end of the week or the end of the month and we will check then. However if you pay after that date we will have to use our arrears process for late payment.

Firm but fair

We aim to be firm but fair in the way we deal with arrears. We will help you as much as we can but we need you to help yourself as well, by talking to us straight away if you can't pay. You need to apply for benefits as soon as possible and work with us to pay any due rent and arrears.

Sam Mnyama

Income Management Officer

1 0113 200 7737

Matt Hull

Income Management Officer

1 0113 200 7733



Estate Visits

Find out when you're due a visit

Unity's Housing Officers Kamila and Rashpal visit each of our estates on a three monthly basis, to make sure that everything is in good order.

If you'd like to request a visit from your Housing Officer when they're next in your area, please call **0113 200 7700**.



Kamila's Estate Walkabouts

Thursday 3rd March & Friday 22nd April -

Copgrove Road, Ryan Place, Upland Gardens, Fearnville Road, Montagu Avenue, Lawrence Gardens, Dorset Road, Ruthven View, Luxor Road, Cowper Grove

Thursday 10th March & Thursday 28th April - Scott Halls, Fieldhouse Drive, Pennythorne Drive

Friday 18th March & Friday 6th May -

Ponderosa Close, Hill Top Mount, Ellers, Alcester Terrace, Bayswaters, Bexleys, Elfords

Thursday 24th March & Thursday 12th May - Parkwood Crescent

Thursday 31st March & Friday 20th May -

Rosebank Crescent, Hessle Road, Royal Parks, Tagore House, Mitford Road, Model Avenue, School Mews, Wesley Road, Fielding Gate/Mews, Mistress Lane, Highfield Gardens, Reyden Mews

Friday 8th April & Thursday 26th May -

Thorn Drive, Briarsdales, Kitcheners, Kimberley Place, Poole Crescent/Road, Maryfield Crescent, Thornfield Way

Thursday 14th April & Friday 3rd June -

Sholebrokes, Mandela Court, Umoja House, Olrika Court, Chapeltown Road, Mexboroughs, Reginalds

Rashpal's Estate Walkabouts

Thursday 7th April – Devon Close, Leicester Close

Friday 15th April – Cliff Terrace, Unity Close

Thursday 21st April – Deighton View, Blackmoor Road, Fir Tree Approach

Tuesday 26th April – Stainbeck Road/Avenue, Bentleys

Thursday 28th April – Stonegates

Thursday 5th May– Haslewood Drive/View, Rigton Green

Thursday 12th May – Leopold Street, Ashton Court

Tuesday 19th May– Jackie Smart Court, Louis Street, Cowper Street, Dodgson Avenue, Frankland Place, Hamilton Avenue

Thursday 26th May – Harehills Ave, Newton Grove, Pear Tree House, Windrush Court

Friday 3rd June - Spencer Place, Markham Avenue, Vicars Road, Gathorne Terrace, Pasture Road

Friday 10th June – Beverleys, Harlech Park Court, Lodge Lane

Thursday 16th June – The Grange, Harding Villas

Estate WalkaboutsRaising the standard of our estates



Supporting BME Communities and Multi-Cultural Neighbourhoods

Joint Estate Inspections

Recently, our Tenant Panel carried out joint inspections of our estates, with Housing Officers to make sure that everything is in good order. They helped us to spot things that Unity needs to fix, and also kept an eye out for where tenants themselves could be doing more to improve the appearance of the estate. Their findings were as follows:

Beeston

Findings: Some residents had made a good effort to keep their gardens tidy, however we did note that some of them could have benefitted from a bit more care and attention. We noted that there was a lot of litter around and some evidence of fly-tipping.

Actions: We wrote to tenants who had messy gardens to remind them of the conditions of their tenancy agreement. We'll also revisit the area in a few months' time to see if they take action. We also notified the council about the fly-tipping.



Findings: We spotted a few gardens that tenants needed to pay a bit more attention to. Some were massively overgrown. Others had lots of bulky waste. Lots of properties had damaged or missing meter cupboard doors, bringing down the appearance of the estate.

Actions: All repairs were reported to the Maintenance Department. We're considering a 'Spring Clean' event to encourage tenants to tackle their overgrown gardens.



Many thanks to Ms C, Crossgates who sent us this picture. Her eco-friendly garden has attracted a whole host of wildlife, including this pair of hedgehogs!



Keeping your garden tidy

It is a condition of your tenancy agreement that:

You must keep it tidy and free from weeds, litter, rubbish and animal waste. This includes cutting your lawns and trimming your hedges and shrubs. You must not allow your garden to become a nuisance and annoyance to neighbours.





Disposal of rubbish

You (or anyone living with you or visiting the property) must only put household rubbish in the bins provided by the Council.

You must not dump or dispose of bulk refuse such as old furniture in the shared areas, or in the garden. You must make appropriate arrangements to promptly take such refuse to a local authority waste disposal site or have the item collected by Leeds City Council.

Leeds City Council provides up to four bulky waste collections, each of up to three items a year, and it's **FREE**. Give them a call on **0113 222 4406**.





Frequently asked questions

What happens if I do not keep my garden and/or driveway tidy?

This is a breach of your tenancy. Unity could ask Environmental Health to intervene and you could be sanctioned by Leeds City Council. If you consistently fail to maintain your property to an acceptable level it could even lead to eviction.

I can no longer look after my garden... what can I do?

If you are unable to tend to your garden because of your age, illness or disability and you don't have a relative, friend or neighbour who can help you, please let Unity know. We might be able to arrange for our gardeners to give you a one-off visit, which you can pay for.

I've inherited a shed from a previous tenant. Will Unity maintain it for me?

No, you are responsible for maintenance of your shed and any other garden furniture or decoration. We do offer an affordable handyperson service which may be useful to you, for example, if your shed roof needs re-felting. Please contact **0113 200 7700** for more information.

Will Unity cut back my trees?

Generally speaking, if a tree is in your garden or on your property – it is your responsibility to cut it back periodically if it becomes a nuisance to you or your neighbours. You may have to contact a tree surgeon if a tree is too big to take on yourself.

My neighbour's property is a disgrace! What should I do?

If your neighbour's is becoming an eyesore - you could try talking to them. It maybe that they have not noticed standards slipping. If your neighbour is also a Unity resident please speak to your Housing Officer. If your neighbour is not a Unity resident, please contact Leeds City Council on **0113 222 4406**.

Can I be involved in inspecting the standard of Unity's estates?

As a resident, you will be welcome to join us on an inspection of your own estate, or an inspection of an estate other than your own. Please contact **Lewis** on **0113 200 7751** if you'd like to get involved.

Building the dream! Unity Housing set for another big year



Supporting BME Communities and Multi-Cultural Neighbourhoods

Unity Homes & Enterprise is entering 2016 with a renewed determination to deliver afforable housing, regenerate local communities and help small businesses grow.

In the last financial year we built 80 new homes and invested more than £1.3 million in home improvements

The building of new properties not only provides homes for people with particular needs and those on low incomes, it also provides job opportunities in the form of construction apprenticeships and work placements.

Employing local people

Unity's Employment Team would be very keen to hear from anyone who is interested in a career in construction. Our contractors are offering paid positions with the opportunity to earn a **CSCS qualification** (find out more opposite).

We are looking for people who are interested in a trainee position in the following trades:

Bricklaying

Mechanical

Joinery

Electrical

Plastering

Painting & Decorating





200 7746

☐ 07714 134 531

Kelly Jennings

1 0113 200 7738

07730 870 810



18 houses



FREE Fruit & Veg - coming to your estate! Green fingered residents get ready!







Wednesday 23rd March: **Chapeltown**Pear Tree House, Back Sholebroke Avenue,
Olrika Court, Mandela Court

Thurdsay 24th March: **Burley & Hyde Park**Rosebank Crescent, Tagore House, Hessle Road

Wednesday 30th March: **Holbeck** Harding Villas, Brown Lane East

Thursday 31st March: **Harehills**Upland Gardens, Ryan Place, Cowper Grove,
Ashton Court

Monday 4th April: **Armley** Fielding Gate, School Mews

Thurdsay 7th April: **Beeston**Hird Street, Beverleys, Harlech Park Court,
The Grange, Parkwood Crescent

Friday 8th April: **Meanwood** Stainbecks, Stonegates, Bentleys, Deighton View

Monday 11th April: **Crossgates**Pooles, Maryfield Crescent, Thornfield Way

Following the success of last year's gardening workshops on selected estates, we'd like to extend the opportunity to all of Unity residents this year.

In the hope of encouraging residents to take pride in their outdoor spaces, and to promote healthy lifestyles – Unity will be providing you with **FREE** plants, pots, seeds and soil to grow your own fruit, vegetables and herbs.

You will be provided with advice and guidance on how to nurture your seedlings and plants so that you can get the best out of them. You can take away a handy guide on how to take care of the plants we have on offer.

Tuesday 12th April: **Burmantofts** Rigton Green, Haslewoods

Wednesday 13th April: **Gipton & Harehills**Briarsdales, Thorn Drive, Kimberleys, Kitcheners

Thursday 14th April: **Chapeltown** Leopold Street, Jackie Smart Court, Reginald Street, Scott Halls

Friday 15th April: **Little London**Leicester Close, Devon Close, Unity Close,
Cliff Terrace

Wednesday 20th April: **Chapel Allerton** Stratford Court

Thursday 21st April: **Moortown**Fieldhouse Drive, Fir Tree Approach,
Blackmoor Road

Friday 22nd April: **Wortley** Highfields

Dates liable to change depending on weather. If we have your mobile number, we will keep you informed by text message.



Contacting Unity

T: 0113 200 7700

E: uha@unityha.co.uk

W: www.unityha.co.uk

Office Hours:

Monday: 9am - 5pm Tuesday: 9am - 5pm Wednesday: 10am - 5pm Thursday: 9am - 5pm 9am - 5pm Friday:

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

0845 634 2766

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

Emergency Gas Repairs 01757 244510



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.uk

For information at your fingertips, visit our website at www.unityha.co.uk for leaflets, latest news and community information.

For comments and suggestions about this newsletter please contact Lewis Holloway on

0113 200 7751 or email

lewis.holloway@unityha.co.uk

Leeds City Council Services

Adult Social Care

0113 222 4401

Anti-Social Behaviour



0113 222 4402



onestop@leeds.gov.uk

Children Social Care

0113 222 4403

Council tax and housing benefit



0113 222 4404

lcc.benefits@leeds.gov.uk

Complaints and compliments

0113 222 4405

Environmental services

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



1 0113 222 4406



refusecollection@leeds.gov.uk

Highways



113 222 4407



highways@leeds.gov.uk

Registrars



1 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.





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