

# **Unity Corporate Plan 2021 - 2026**

## **1.0 Foreword**

1.1 Unity is a housing association driven by its social purpose to tackle inequality and empower local people to improve their prospects. We were formed in 1987 to meet the urgent housing needs of black and minority ethnic people (BME) in Leeds. Today we are more than a housing association. While we have a core business that manages 1,300 affordable homes, provides a good landlord service and contributes to the physical regeneration of communities, we are honing our expertise in other areas, such as enabling local people to find employment, access education/training, and supporting fledgling entrepreneurs to set up their own businesses.

1.2 We are proud of what we have achieved with our core business, but recognise there is a great deal more to do to fulfil our social purpose. Our Board has articulated a vision for our future, to build success over the next five years. This Corporate Plan is designed to deliver that vision by 2026, through setting challenging targets and objectives for us to meet.

## **2.0 Operating Environment**

In defining how we move forward we have taken stock of the current situation and the challenges ahead.

2.1 The Covid19 pandemic promises to make permanent changes to the way we work provide services and interact with customers. For more than a year our staff have been performing most of their duties from home and customers have had to access services remotely. We expect staff will want to retain workplace flexibility and most customers will eventually prefer the speed and convenience new technology offers. We do not know yet whether these trends will last the test of time, so our arrangements need to be flexible, and able to adapt as events unfold.

2.2 Inclusive Growth will be a priority for local and central governments post pandemic. It is about enabling local people to contribute to and benefit from the economic opportunities in their community. This is Unity's Unique Selling Point and we believe we can play a significant role in Leeds.

2.3 We can only see tenant expectations continuing to rise. They no longer compare us with other housing providers, but with companies like Ocado, Amazon and Uber. So in addition to getting things "right first time" and "doing what we say we will", they are increasingly expecting us to keep their homes and estates in great condition without their oversight and input. Calls for their involvement must be made sparingly, respecting the many competing demands on their free time. This may sound the death knell for traditional forms of resident involvement, shifting instead to a landlord/tenant relationship based across multi-media, interacting using their channels of choice on issues and at times that suits them. Older and vulnerable tenants may still want face to face involvement, so our model has to cater for all needs.

2.4 With 59% of our tenants reliant on Universal Credit or housing benefit<sup>5</sup> to pay their rent, the biggest challenge they face is coping on relatively modest funds. Spending prolonged periods on a low income causes stress, which affects personal relationships, physical and mental health and wellbeing and the ability to seize opportunities. In Leeds 24% of children live in low income households<sup>1</sup> and 33% of children are in relative poverty<sup>2</sup>. 70%

of our tenants are BME and the unemployment rate of BME people in Leeds is 7.4% compared to 3.2% for white people<sup>3</sup>. Our tenants are also less likely to have a safety net in the event of a crisis. We also know the position is worst among young BME whose economic situation has suffered most from the pandemic, with unemployment said to be around 40%<sup>4</sup>. This means going forwards, the best support we can provide our tenants are initiatives to enhance or maximize their income. Currently our employment and enterprise services fit that criterion.

2.5 Climate change is a further consideration as we look at how to develop sustainable homes and retrofit our existing homes to improve efficiency and achieve carbon neutrality. The Government recently announced bringing forward the target to cut carbon emissions by 78% from 2050 to 2030. The US has taken a similar approach, other nations are expected to follow suit and this may be a growing realisation that the problem is a lot more urgent than many had hoped. Nevertheless, bringing forward the target exerts more financial pressure on us as we have not yet identified the cost of achieving the previous target.

2.6 The roll-out of Universal Credit continues and this is increasing hardship for many families and individuals living in our communities.

2.7 The Sewell Report promised to change the debate on racism in Britain, but instead has sparked huge controversy, not least by downplaying racism as a substantial cause of the problems BME people face today. We believe racism in Britain is still significant and is a cause of many of the housing inequalities we see such as:

- ✚ One in three homeless households are from ethnic minority backgrounds compared to one in seven from the general population;
- ✚ 2% of White British households are overcrowded compared with 24% of Bangladeshi households; 18% of Pakistani households and 16% of Black African households;
- ✚ Ethnic minority households are more likely to live in older and fuel poor accommodation, and in flats and terraced homes in the most deprived neighbourhoods and worst living environments, including lack of access to green space.
- ✚ The poverty rate for ethnic minorities groups is almost twice that for the White population and has been exacerbated by welfare reforms that penalise young people and larger households, through the use of benefit caps.

Nevertheless, the Government is supporting the report and intends to implement some of the recommendations so we need to find ways of working with them in line with our social purpose.

2.8 The Government is promising to put into law many of the proposals set out in its White Paper. The main themes are building and resident safety, giving residents a bigger voice, and improving landlord transparency and accountability to their tenants. Unity is firmly committed to all these objectives.

### **3.0 Our Organisation**

Unity is based in Leeds; our main focus is Chapeltown/Harehills & Beeston/Holbeck, the neighbouring areas and Kirklees. Our subsidiary, Unity Enterprise, has been operating since

2000 and manages three business centres. We employ 39 staff and current turnover is £8m. Customer satisfaction is 84% and we are GI and VI rated by the Regulator.

### 3.1 Our Social Purpose

Unity is different to other housing associations whose core housing business is also their social purpose. For us providing great housing services to our tenants is a prerequisite to indulge our social purpose. This is:

**“To fight inequality and empower BME people to improve their lives by creating opportunities and helping to regenerate communities”**

The Board reviewed its social purpose in April 2021. While there is a lot that can be done to fight inequality, empower BME people and regenerate communities, we are unable to do everything. We have decided to focus on inclusive growth, which is the greatest need for the area in the foreseeable future. We are unique among housing associations in having existing employment; training and entrepreneurial services and these give us an opportunity to directly impact people's lives and make the biggest possible contribution to transforming the life chances of local people.

### 3.2 Our Five year Vision

Board Members, Tenant representatives, staff and the Executive Team have been involved in formulating the five-year vision for the organisation.

**We want to be known as an excellent service provider that meaningfully engages with and involves its tenants, while actively growing and strengthening the business. Just as importantly we want to do a great deal more to enhance and develop our social purpose, creating opportunities for people to make real and lasting improvements in their lives.**

### 3.3 Our Values

**Integrity** – Being honest, transparent and sincere with strong principles

**Respect** – In the way we treat people, service users and each other

**Flexibility** – In how we work for the benefit of our tenants, other people, the organisation and each other

**Commitment** – To provide services to meet the needs of our tenants, local people and local neighbourhoods

**Business focussed** – Continually review and adopt best practice and ensure we operate efficiently and effectively in order to make best use of resources

**Equality and fairness** – In the way we work and deliver services

### 3.4 Our BME status

We are proud of our BME credentials, and recognise that the onus is to go beyond a commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Hence, we strive to challenge

inequality by being a voice for BME people, and taking up their concerns. We see no contradiction in also retaining a diverse Board and workforce that includes non BME people because we value diversity and inclusion and relish the creativity and innovation it allows us to have. Similarly, all our services are available to everyone who have the same needs and live in the communities we serve.

While British society has evolved, and some would argue is less hostile to the advancement of ethnic minorities, the pandemic has shown many inequalities remain for whatsoever reason. Our BME credentials lie in a commitment to help as many BME people as possible to overcome barriers, whether principally caused by racism or not.

3.4.1 We aspire to achieve the Housing Diversity Network's EDI Accreditation and will be reviewing our EDI strategy with this intention. Through our engagement surveys this year we hope to improve our understanding of the needs of our more vulnerable customers, particularly in light of the challenges and risks posed by COVID-19.

## **4.0 The strategy**

Unlike previous plans this one extends over five years because we are serious about transforming Unity and are giving our people time both to plan and innovate to get us there.






### **4.1 | Strategic themes**

Over the next five years we will focus activity on delivering to five strategic themes. These are:

1. Providing excellent customer service and sustaining meaningful tenant engagement
2. Growing and protecting the organisation
3. Raising operational performance to best in class
4. Developing and enhancing our social purpose
5. Strengthening the resilience and harnessing the innovative potential of our people

### **4.2 Strategic objectives**

Success in these five areas will ensure we achieve our strategic objectives which are:

-  To be one of the best performing and most well regarded social landlords in the country
-  To have a financially strong, viable and growing business with a prolonged shelf-life
-  To have a reputation as a community anchor, dedicated to serving and engaging with the community and working in partnership with other agencies to improve the lives of its people.
-  To be known for the breadth and depth of our social purpose activities and the overwhelmingly beneficial impact these have had on the lives of many people, for tackling inequality and being a beacon for others to follow.
-  To be a great organisation to work for, making our people proud and enhancing their potential

### **4.3 Monitoring and review**

4.3.1 Delivering this Corporate Plan is important to us so it will be regularly monitored and reviewed through a succession of Annual Plans. These contain the targets and objectives in the Corporate Plan that must be achieved in a particular year. Progress on the Annual Plan

will be reported to the Board quarterly. In addition, the Board will review the Corporate Plan at the end of each calendar year to, amongst other things, determine what must be achieved in next year's Annual Plan to remain on track.

## **5.0 What we intend to do**

### **5.1 Excelling at Customer Service and Resident Engagement**

Housing is our core business. It helps us address housing inequalities and generates the surpluses that support our social purpose. Hence tenants are our first priority and providing them with an excellent service is a prerequisite for everything else we do.

In fact, we want to provide tenants with the best possible housing service; extend the range and opportunities for them to be involved and to engage with us; provide additional services to help them improve their life chances; and satisfy the demands for digital services and Omni-channel preferences.

#### **5.1.1 Quest for Service Excellence**

We want all our tenants to experience excellent customer service that treats them with respect, is responsive to their needs and ensures they are involved and consulted about key issues that affect them.

Since customer satisfaction is the best measure of a service, we aspire to have one of the highest levels of satisfaction in our region. This will not be easy but we start from a solid base. We will accomplish this by perfecting the customer interface. Over the life of this Plan we will make small, consistent improvements to the services our tenants receive by mapping the customer journey, evaluating the feedback we receive from them through surveys, resident fora and focus groups and implementing the recommendations. The momentum for this process will be maintained by the Customer Service Team. They will be put at the centre of managing the customer interface, with the backroom teams giving top priority to their requests and meeting their deadlines. Mapping the customer journey to access a range of frontline services will identify the areas for improvement, and we will implement improvement plans and monitor progress. This process will also highlight new areas for automation and re-engineering.

Secondly we will ensure tenants play an active role in the journey. We are committed to tenant involvement and will continue to involve tenants every step of the way and work in partnership with them to ensure our revised services meet their expectations.

Our front-line staff will work in a broader and more accountable way to support customers in getting the best from their homes and our services. They will use their knowledge and resources to signpost customers to social purpose services across all our businesses streams and services offered by other agencies.

We want our staff to remain focused on delivering amazing customer service that constantly exceeds the expectations of our customers. So, we will take a variety of approaches to embed a service culture that puts customers first. All staff will receive regular training to ensure we are up to date with best practice and that in every interaction with tenants they reflect the culture and values of Unity. Alongside this there will be regular review with customers of our service offer and service standards and these will be benchmarked against our peers to ensure they compare favourably with other organisations.

Once the service starts to improve, staying ahead becomes more difficult. This is why we want actively to pursue external accreditations and submit our service to external scrutiny and competition to win national awards. Customer Service Excellence is an example of a national accreditation and provides us with a valuable roadmap to service excellence, while accolades and awards motivate our staff and grants them widespread recognition for the work they do. A reputation for great service also helps us to attract and retain talent and create an environment in which colleagues can be at their most productive. We will compete for national customer service awards to help build and retain this reputation.

### **5.1.3 Extending Tenant and Resident Engagement**

We are passionate about engaging with residents and involving them, especially in making decisions that directly affect them. So going forward we are confident about complying with the spirit of both the Government's White Paper and the NHF "together with tenants" four-point plan.

Our customers tell us we are great at providing services and showing them empathy. We intend to add to this list that we empower them to inform, shape and decide the service they receive and the views and needs of residents and other customers is at the heart of strategic decision-making in Unity.

We believe we have fallen short of our intentions in the past because we have failed to recognise that:

- ✚ Tenants want us to use more modern and convenient forms of engagement;
- ✚ We are one of many competing demands on tenants' time so we need to be more innovative to grab their attention
- ✚ We need accurate data telling us what residents are interested in and how they want to engage with us.
- ✚ We have tried to engage tenants on issues that interest us rather than finding out and engaging on their interests

We intend to put this right with a detailed customer profile survey (healthcheck) in year 1 of the Plan. This is important for three reasons. Firstly, it will provide more information and insight about our tenants and their household, which will help us to identify unmet needs and tailor services to meet them. Secondly, we will know more how our customers want to be informed, involved and engaged and this will lead to more channels and more creative ways for tenant engagement. Thirdly, we will have information to be able to design services around customers. We will then prepare and resource a new Resident Engagement Strategy based upon what our Residents have told us.

We aim to know and understand our customers better so we can respond more effectively with a flexible, value-for-money range of homes, services and support to match their needs and preferences. Because we are Unity this will mean responding to other aspects of their lives too by increasingly introducing related services such as money advice and affordable warmth.

Engagement is only meaningful if the issue is relevant to both parties. In future we want to use detailed and up-to-date information about customer preferences and the priorities in their neighbourhoods to engage with them on issues most relevant to them. This will mean an Engagement Strategy that is not principally centred on housing or the service tenants receive from us. In particular, we want to engage tenants in our social purpose and equality

issues, and examine how we can utilise their knowledge and skills to help us better deliver these big agendas.

#### **5.1.4 Providing opportunities to improve life chances**

As a social landlord we have no obligation to go beyond meeting the regulatory requirements stipulated in our service offer. However, as a BME organisation committed to tackling inequality it makes perfect sense. For us the ultimate goal is to facilitate better life chances for our tenants. Delivering a great housing service is a means to this end, not an end in itself. We know decent housing on its own is not enough to enable some tenants to overcome secondary barriers to success. This is why we are constantly assessing whether to add to our service offer related services that have the potential to improve the lives of tenants and render for them a more successful outcome.

We know from feedback that the greatest need for most of our customers is to increase their income. That is why we have been developing our expertise in helping them to find employment, undertake training/education to improve their career prospects and support those who aspire to set up their own business. Over the life of the plan, we will increase the number of tenants (including members of their household) taking up these options. In addition, we want to help those people who will be reliant on income from welfare benefits for the foreseeable future. We propose in year two establishing an in-house Welfare Benefits Advisory Service. We believe a large number of our tenants are under-claiming their benefits. Nationally about 8% of welfare benefits are unclaimed. This service is currently outsourced but we believe we can make a bigger impact by being able to target customers ourselves. A successful take-up campaign would make a big difference for many households. The new service is expected to be launched in 2022 with a target of recovering £250k of unclaimed benefits by 2026.

#### **5.1.5 To move to a more digitally driven service**

In today's environment, customers expect a speedy service and want to spend less of their time checking and monitoring that we are getting it right. Post Covid19 they have become used to the convenience of accessing services electronically. In response we will set out our stall to get things right first time and to use our IT resources to the fullest extent to save both time and costs for ourselves and our customers. At the same time, we remain conscious that along with differing needs, not all customers are connected to digital services. Therefore, we aim to deliver 'brilliant basics' and a connected 'omni-channel' approach that provides choice and consistently high levels of service however customers choose to engage with us.

5.1.6 See appendix I for the specific targets and objectives

### **5.2 Growing and protecting the business**

#### **5.2.1 Growth**

Over the last few years, development has been our main means of growth and we have been growing at 3.6% per year, creatively utilising our full development capacity. As a result, we have utilised the majority of our current capacity and have to undergo a five-year lean period in which development growth will be limited to an average of ten properties per year. We have examined all the options to outperform this projection. The most obvious is to cross subsidise using the income from outright market sales and shared ownership to



support more new build affordable homes. However, this is an extremely high risk option in the low land value areas we operate, because sales are not guaranteed to make a surplus. Shifting focus to high value areas has the risk of abortive costs because we are liable to be outbid by larger organisations. Our Board rightly do not have the appetite for this level of risk, so we need to look for growth elsewhere.

Instead we will look at other options to grow our stock. One of them is to examine the feasibility of supporting the Council by procuring properties they can use as temporary accommodation to meet their homelessness obligations.

#### 5.2.1.1 Selling development services

For some years Unity has developed homes as a consortium partner, but that arrangement has ceased. We have a strong reputation for development and have been providing development support to several small community-based organisations for years as part of our social purpose. We will therefore pursue the option of setting up our own development consortium and continue to offer development support services to generate external income.

#### 5.2.1.2 Fundraising

Over the next few years Inclusive Growth will be top of the agenda for Government, regional and local authorities, and business leaders. The Leeds City Region and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority have already drafted plans. We believe we are in a good position to attract external funding because our social purpose initiatives are aimed at tackling the inequalities that prevent BME people from making a full contribution to the local economy. External grant funding is growth, albeit short term, and we will seek to grow our business in this way in order to benefit more people.

#### 5.2.1.3 Partnerships

We believe we are a natural partner and so we are keen to work in partnership with other housing organisations in order to save costs, enhance the impact or improve the outcomes of existing activities. We have started discussions with other HAs about sharing backroom services and we are minded to develop this approach during the life of the plan, provided the integrity and independence of Unity is not impaired.

We will also consider partnerships with other organisations, under our social purpose banner, to develop new services designed to meet current unmet needs.

#### 5.2.2 Protecting the business.

For us business growth and protecting the business are closely linked. Growth exposes the business to new risks that it is essential are identified and managed effectively. At the same time growth is about taking risks, in accordance with the organisations risk appetite, and only well managed, secure organisations will be able to fully capitalise on growth opportunities.

##### 5.2.2.1 Health and safety

Customers are at the forefront of everything we do and their safety is paramount. This is a priority for Unity. We will ensure that our customers know this and that they can be confident their homes are safe. The board has expressed no appetite for risk in the areas of landlord compliance and Health & Safety. Working to the highest industry standards and



mindful of potential post-Grenfell legislative changes, they require excellent records of compliance and high standards of inspection to be maintained

#### 5.2.2.2 Managing our assets

The management of our assets includes a variety of complex activities that go beyond simple investment in property maintenance. While always recognising that our assets are primarily people's homes, we will look to maximise the contribution they make to our competing financial and social objectives. We will invest appropriately in our assets by basing our strategic plans on the best available data and analysis; we will manage income and expenditure effectively to ensure our homes are well maintained and customer satisfaction is high; we will keep abreast of technical innovations in the industry to enable us both to anticipate problems and maximise opportunities as they arise.

#### 5.2.2.3 Sustainability

We will ensure that our housing meets the needs of our customers, both now and in the future. In addition, we will actively manage and invest in assets economically, sustainably and safely. We will have a clear sustainability plan for assets and will assist in supporting and improving neighbourhoods by enhancing the environmental performance of our homes.

#### 5.2.2.4 Financial Management and Regulatory compliance

We are proud of our GI VI rating, which confirms we are a well-run, well-managed organisation. Our priority is not only to retain the rating but to build upon it. While we have a robust regulatory framework in place to ensure homes are safe and we are delivering decent, affordable homes, we will be prepared to meet the challenges that lie ahead from the Government's proposed legislation and the promise of an empowered Regulator. We will be transparent and accountable in our investment choices and continue to grow, owning and managing more homes across the Yorkshire region, through organic growth and mergers that enhance our principles, not just our balance sheet, and protect our core beliefs.

#### 5.2.2.5 Governance

We are considering adopting the revised NHF code of governance as part of Unity's strategy to maintain its good standard of governance while adapting to the changing values and pressures we are facing. We will also protect the organisation's legacy, its history, roots, who and what it represents. We do not want to become mainstream through the back door and wish to remain true to our founders' vision.

5.2.3 See appendix 2 for the specific targets and objectives

### 5.3 Operational Performance

5.3.1 The business depends on a number of operational activities taking place consistently month after month. The best known ones are the landlord services (e.g. Income Collection, Repairs and Void turnaround). These have Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and performance is benchmarked with other providers. Of the eight KPIs benchmarked, six place us in the 3rd quartile or below. This is not consistent with how we see ourselves.

5.3.2 Equally critical to the business are various backroom activities upon which the business depends. These include producing monthly management accounts, maintaining IT systems,

ensuring the health and safety of residents, the letting of commercial units and producing the performance data that tells us how we are doing.

5.3.3 All these activities demand regular input, accuracy and efficiency to ensure we produce the best outcomes for customers, use our resources effectively, keep the business running, maximize income or minimise costs and losses. Moreover, how well we do these things in comparison with other organisations tells us how good we are.

5.3.4 Over the last year we have been making progress by:

- Putting in place a revised performance framework that helps us maintain focus on what we want to achieve
- Agreeing to set ourselves progressively improving targets based on the performance of top HAs in the sector
- Planning to carrying out detailed reviews in two key areas of the business to identify areas for improvement
- Starting to embed a culture of continuous improvement

5.3.5 We want to be very good indeed so over the next five years we will raise our performance to match our ambition. All operational activities will be top quartile or thereabout by 2026. We aim to succeed by comparing ourselves with the best, inculcating a competitive mentality, setting improving targets based on benchmark information, learning from outstanding organisations and consistently adopting best practice.

5.3.6 In addition there are four areas where we want to make a distinct impact:

#### 5.3.6.1 Decarbonisation

We see decarbonisation as saving the planet and tackling fuel poverty, and would like to achieve the Government's revised target well ahead of the deadline. However carbon neutrality is unaffordable for us without the emergence of new cheaper technologies at some time in the future.

During the life of this plan we will focus on reducing energy consumption and making components more energy efficient. We plan for all our properties to reach band C EPC rating by 2030, and currently 96 properties are well below this standard. We will improve the fabric of our buildings, exploiting existing technologies to raise energy efficiency, while being prepared to switch to and embrace new technology when they prove their worth. We will also explore exit routes for those properties that might be uneconomic to retrofit. We are conscious that our size puts us at a disadvantage because retrofitting is expensive and the technology is new and changing fast. To mitigate this, we will look to proceed in partnership with like-minded organisations.

#### 5.3.6.2 ASB

During the pandemic we saw a huge increase in ASB cases and this has cast a spotlight on this important service. We will carry out a detailed review of the service because we want it to be the best it can be. This will include assessing performance against service standards, evaluating the quality of communication with victims while allegations are being investigated, and subjecting performance results to the review of Operations Committee in line with other KPIs.

#### 5.3.6.3 Service reviews for Rent Collection and Void Turnaround to achieve top quartile

Our performance on managing arrears has been well below expectations for some time and we are committed to changing that. We are half way through a full service review and its primary objective is to outline the route to top quartile performance by 2026. In contrast Covid19 has damaged our void performance and the review will quickly get us back on track.

5.3.7 See appendix 3 for the specific targets and objectives

#### **5.4 Developing and investing in our social purpose**

At Unity we believe in maximising our operating surplus for social ends. This means we strive to make surpluses in order to fulfil our social purpose. Thomas Gray's 18<sup>th</sup> century poem "Elegy written in a country churchyard" describes the restricted lives of people living in poverty in the countryside. Deprived of attention, support and opportunities, their talent, hopes and dreams are wasted. In a famous stanza he compares their plight to beautiful pearls and flowers that no one ever sees:

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene  
The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear;  
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen  
And waste its sweetness on the desert air"

In a nutshell Unity's social purpose is to bring opportunity to people whose talent would otherwise not be seen or heard. Our primary focus is helping individuals to set up their own business, find employment or access training and education to improve their career prospects. We think this is where we can make the biggest impact with our limited resources, directly undermining some of the root causes of inequality in Britain.

##### **5.4.1. Facilitating and supporting fledgling entrepreneurs**

We specialize in supporting new entrepreneurs. Over the next five years we will enhance this specialism in a number of ways. Currently we mostly support entrepreneurs who have already crossed barriers to setting up a business. Our new BME project will go out into the community to find and support potential entrepreneurs who have not made it this far. Over five years our target is 100 people with the expectation that at least 20 will succeed in creating viable lasting businesses in Leeds. In addition, we will establish a new Incubation Hub in the Leeds Media Centre. It will have up to date facilities, trainers and coaches to enable budding entrepreneurs to hone their skills, shape their ideas, develop Business Plans and launch their business projects. Lastly we will target more intensive support and financial assistance at the most promising novices, including helping them to approach private institutions for business loans, providing subsistence allowances and renting to them Unity business units at discounted rents.

##### **5.4.2 Employment, education and training services**

We maintained our Employment Service when some associations cut theirs during the four years of 1% rent reduction. Today following the pandemic and the consequential flux in the jobs market, local residents have a greater need for these services. We intend to respond by expanding our service over the next five years. Apart from expansion we aim to develop our expertise and improve the quality, reach and impact of our services.

We will expand the service gradually to meet assessed needs, but only where resources allow and we can justify growth through a cost/benefit analysis. Expansion will include improving accessibility for BME groups we have not reached; putting more emphasis on

helping people who are not job ready to get into work; providing a new Welfare Benefits service to maximise the incomes of people likely to remain dependent on benefits for some time; and encouraging more people to take up training and education opportunities to improve their life chances.

Our aim is that by 2026 Unity's Employment Service will have assisted as many people in that five years as in the whole of its existence since 2008 (2,440).

#### 5.4.3. Tackling Health inequality

The pandemic has demonstrated serious health inequalities in this region and our Board feel we should be developing a service to help improve BME health and wellbeing. The question is what? This will be a new area where we have no expertise, but over the next five years we will look for partners and the right set of projects or initiatives to invest in.

5.4.4 We know there is an abundance of need in our local communities but we are unable to do everything. Instead we will focus on making the most direct, immediate and permanent impact on people's life chances. So this means resisting the urge to spread resources thinly by supporting a variety of local "feel good" initiatives. Instead we will invest our resources to help individuals help themselves.

5.4.5 See appendix 4 for the specific targets and objectives

### **5.5 Building resilience through Organisational and Human Resource Development**

5.5.1 Our objectives are outward facing. But to achieve them we need to continue to focus internally and transform the business to drive better customer satisfaction, value for money and performance through motivated and engaged colleagues. To ensure we can deliver our plans, we need to invest in our people, processes and technology because success depends on having an engaged workforce with the skills, knowledge and tools to do the job, and the motivation to strive for high performance and continuous improvement. Last but not least we want an organisational culture that promotes innovation and embraces change because this will make us resilient as we face unanticipated challenges that lie ahead.

#### 5.5.2 Workspace.

Prior to the pandemic we were concerned our office facility was inadequate. Subsequently many staff have indicated a willingness to work from home, giving us the option to consider a more agile office environment. This may render the current space suitable for our long terms needs. But we will keep a watching brief because this may change and we want to keep up with their expectations and serve customer needs.

#### 5.5.3 Use of technology and achieve a paperless environment

We will review our IT Strategy to ensure we are using technology to its best potential for the business and ensure colleagues have the right tools to deliver great services for our customers. We will also support our staff so all of them are able to make the change, and embrace technology so we achieve a paperless office by 2026.

#### 5.5.4 People Skills

We commit to developing our employees, ensuring they have the knowledge, skills and experience needed to thrive in the modern work environment. We recognise our people are the most important asset we have. So we must ensure they have the knowledge skills, experience and wellbeing needed to thrive in the modern work environment and deliver an excellent customer service. This will improve staff opportunity to secure promotion elsewhere, but we are content to be a supplier of staff to other organisations, with knowledge, understanding and commitment to improve customers' lives and address inequalities.

#### 5.5.5 Active Leadership

According to workplace research company, Gallup, managers account for at least 70% of the variance in employee engagement scores and we will invest to develop the leadership capability of our Executive and Management teams. In addition to general training we will have a dedicated training and development package designed to equip them with the skills the business needs.

#### 5.5.6 Reward and recognition

We think it is important to signal to all staff the behaviours we regard and want to encourage more of in the organisation. Similarly, we want to give all staff the incentive to improve. Hence we will consider a recognition system so that staff feel rewarded and are motivated to succeed in their role.

#### 5.5.7 Health and Wellbeing

We need all our people to be well - mentally and physically. We will extend our wellbeing programme to support and engage our employees, introducing a range of recurring and one-off events to promote health and wellbeing while they are in the workplace.

#### 5.5.8 See appendix 5 for the specific targets and objectives

### 6.0 Conclusion

6.1 This plan seeks to improve all areas of the business. This is critical for us because improving the way we work will create the capacity to deliver our social purpose, meet more needs, build more homes, provide better value services and do more to make neighbourhoods better places to live.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Children in low income families: local area statistics (HMRC & DWP) March 2021

<sup>2</sup> Source: the Leeds observatory

<sup>3</sup> Source: Yorkshire Post 20<sup>th</sup> January 2019

<sup>4</sup> Source: MSN.com 04/05/21

<sup>5</sup> Source: Unity rent accounts