



Homes & Enterprise

Supporting BME Communities  
and Multi-Cultural Neighbourhoods

# ANNUAL REPORT 2024



# Contents

Chair's Foreword	3
Unity in context	4
Strategic drive and direction	5
Customer satisfaction	6
Business performance	8
Service performance	12
Community Development	14
Financial Performance	16
Investing in our team	18



# CHAIR'S FOREWORD

## A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

Welcome to Unity's latest Annual Report for tenants. It updates you on our performance and main activities from April 2023 to March 2024.

In summary the cost-of-living crisis made this a difficult year for tenants as many faced additional financial pressures to manage household budget and maintain their families. Unity supported many tenants struggling to make ends meet, and we will continue to do this next year.

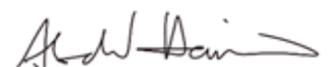
The rising cost of goods and materials and the government's cap on rent increases made it a difficult year too for Unity and its staff. Nevertheless, we remain on course to deliver Corporate Plan goals, our customer satisfaction is comparatively good, we have invested in improving tenants' homes and 4,869 responsive repairs were carried out. While there is need for improvement, most notably in the repairs service and income collection, we have put plans in place to ensure these areas improve soon.

The biggest change you will notice in this report, compared to previous ones, is the reporting of Tenant Satisfaction Measures. These are new standards for social landlord introduced by the government. They are intended to give you better information about how we performed and enable you to compare us with others.

The most important objective for Unity is that you are satisfied with the service you receive from us and working with tenants to ensure this remains our key focus. That is why we are grateful to residents who are involved helping us to deliver the service and those who respond to surveys and give feedback, so we know where we must improve.

We're always pleased to hear from you and get your feedback on our services. This report shows how working with you helps to improve the services that we offer. If you are interested in the various consultations planned and opportunities arranged to influence what we do, visit our website to for information how you can be involved.

I hope you'll find this report a useful summary of our work. Let us know what you think by emailing [uha@unityha.co.uk](mailto:uha@unityha.co.uk). Moreover, for regular updates on what we are doing and how we are performing during the year please look on the website for a copy of our quarterly newsletter.



Abdul Hamied

# UNITY IN CONTEXT

**“PROVIDING DECENT HOMES AND SERVICES TO SATISFY OUR TENANTS IS OUR PRIORITY”**

Unity Housing Association was established in 1987 to meet the needs of BME people living in Leeds. Our main business is a housing association, and we own or manage 1393 properties in Leeds and Huddersfield.



**“UNITY IS MORE THAN A HOUSING ASSOCIATION. WE FIGHT INEQUALITY BY PROVIDING BME PEOPLE WITH ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES TO TRANSFORM THEIR LIVES”**

Our social purpose is to provide opportunities for people to improve their life chances. That is why we also specialise in supporting and helping BME people to find a job, take up training or education opportunities to improve their career prospects or to set up and run their own business. These services can transform lives, build resilience, and have a major impact on health, well-being, and community cohesion.

Our subsidiary **Unity Enterprise** lets out workspace to business start-ups, provides business training and support to fledgling entrepreneurs and undertakes outreach in the local community to encourage local people to see creating and running their own business as a career opportunity.

We are committed to providing the best possible service to all our customers. We aim to get things right first time, but we know we're not perfect and sometimes we might get things wrong. That is when it is important we respect our customers and work with them to improve. We are constantly trying to adapt, innovate and improve to meet the needs and changing demands and expectations of our customers.



# STRATEGIC DRIVE AND DIRECTION

The five-and-a half-year Corporate Plan commenced in June 2021 and completes on 31st March 2027, so we are halfway through. Our focus until 2027 is to achieve the five strategic themes:

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 to create opportunities for BME people

5

Strengthening the resilience and harnessing the innovative potential of our Staff

**“UNITY IS DRIVEN TO ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES IN ITS CORPORATE PLAN”**

## KEY CORPORATE PLAN ACHIEVEMENTS

- Only 0.5% (7) properties are not decent for tenants to live in
- Many and varied partnerships with other organisations to deliver better services.
- Attracted over £180k of external funding that have enabled us to provide new services to local people
- Grown our development consortium to six partners, not only earning Unity fee income but enabling smaller associations to use their development capacity to build new homes
- Produced strong performance on customer satisfaction as evidenced by the government’s Tenant Satisfaction Measures
- Won several national awards for our services and being shortlisted for many more
- Retained our top rating for both financial management and governance.

Every year we produce an annual plan. It contains the in-year targets and objectives to stay on track with the corporate plan. In 2024 the Annual plan had 30 objectives. Below is summary of our performance.

Achieved

16

Substantial progress made

9

Little or no progress made

5

Total

30

- Introduced a first-class system for accurate and comprehensive recording, monitoring and reporting of building compliance for the first time.
- Established a new joint reception service (residential and business tenants) that is working well in the LMC.
- Introduced an outreach service to find and encourage potential entrepreneurs in the local community.
- Retained improvements in void turnaround.



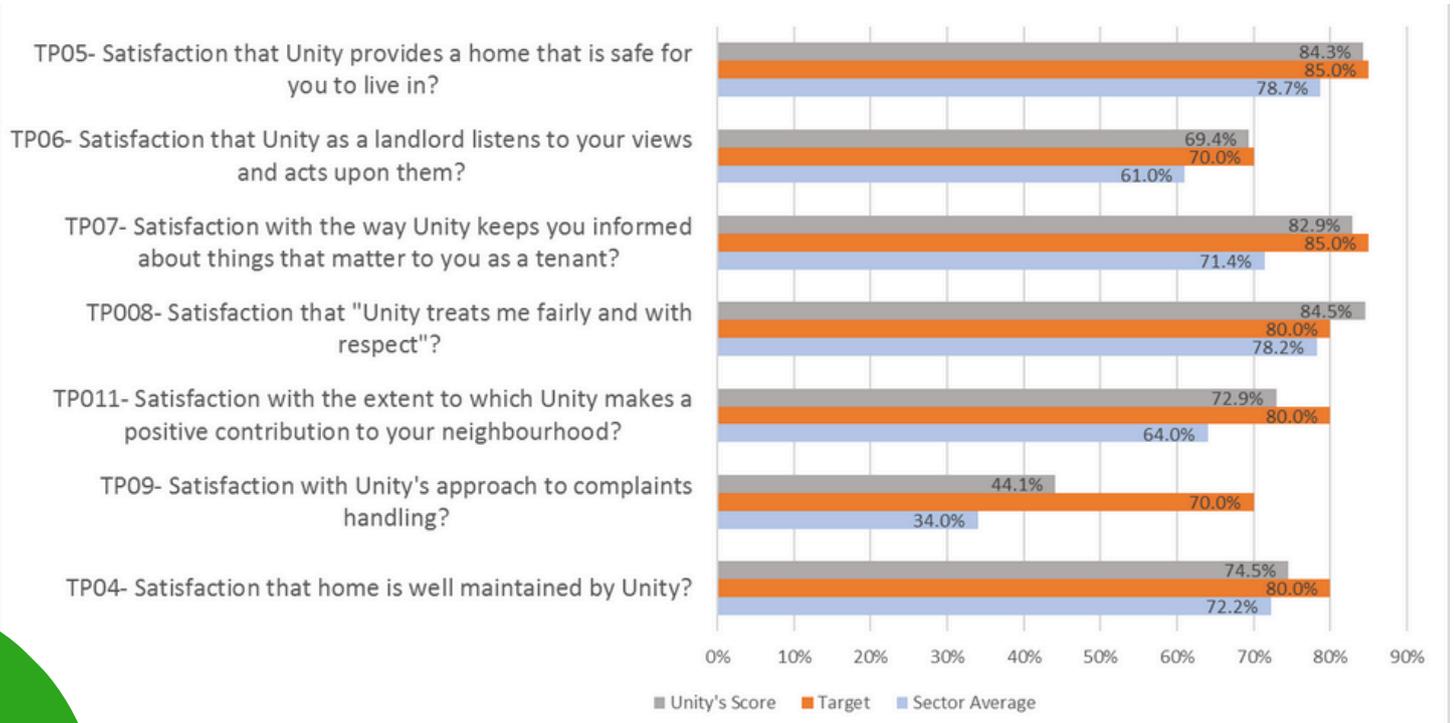
# CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

We delight in satisfying our customers. It is a big motivation for doing our job and the best measure of how well we do it. That is why we set satisfaction targets, carry out a variety of surveys and report the results.

Tenant overall satisfaction with our services ended the year strongly with nearly 74.5% of customers satisfied with the service provided by Unity. That compares well with other Housing Associations, but we want it to be higher, that is why we have set a target of 80%.

The table below shows our performance against other Tenant Satisfaction Measures.

## Performance Dashboard Customer Satisfaction/feedback



We are very happy to see ourselves top quartile for customer satisfaction with how we listen and take tenant views into account (69.4%), for keeping tenants informed (82.9%) and for treating tenants fairly and with respect (84.5%).

However we know our satisfaction levels are impaired by the repairs service, which is performing below expectations. We are working to transform this service and do much better to meet customer expectations.



## We will increase satisfaction in the year ahead by

- Improving our repairs and maintenance performance
- Delivering our planned programmes of works
- Securing better value for money for service charge payers
- Having a consistently good estate cleaning and grounds maintenance service
- Working with residents to improve estates with relatively low levels of tenant satisfaction



# BUSINESS PERFORMANCE

Unity is a social landlord. This means we are not in the business to make a profit. All the money we collect in rent goes into our homes and services. We charge a social rent which is about **40%** lower than a market rent because we want our homes to be affordable to local people on low incomes.

People in social housing are entitled to a first-rate service, so to bridge the gap there are activities in the business we need to run efficiently to save cost. This can mean replacing components only when they need to be, getting the best value for money from procurement, adopting more efficient ways of working and finding solutions for tenants that provide the best value for money.

## RENT

We must collect as much rent as possible to be able to deliver the services customers need and want. Although income collection improved last year, we are still a long way off where we want to be. Our Income Management team has gone through some changes in the last year and has a renewed focus on working with our tenants to bring arrears cases down and ensure they have the right support in place if they are experiencing financial difficulties.

We have invested in new software which will allow us to automate many of the income management activities, allowing more time for our team to better support our tenants in bringing their arrears down and preventing large arrears cases. This will be implemented in November. At the same time we will take more enforcement action where necessary including eviction if we have exhausted all options and tenants will not engage with us.



**Rent arrears as a percentage of rent charged annually**

**4.6%** (4.84% 22/23)

**53%** accounts in arrears (50% 22/23)

**£8.119m** rent collected in 23/24 compared to (£8.009m in 22/23)



# EMPTY HOMES MANAGEMENT

The time taken to repair and let empty homes improved during the year, and we are performing well in comparison with other landlords. We will continue to drive down the time it takes to prepare a property for a new tenant because this maximises our income and reduces waiting times for new tenants.

No of lettings in 23/24



Turnaround time excluding properties needing major works



Customer satisfaction on how we manage the lettings process with customers

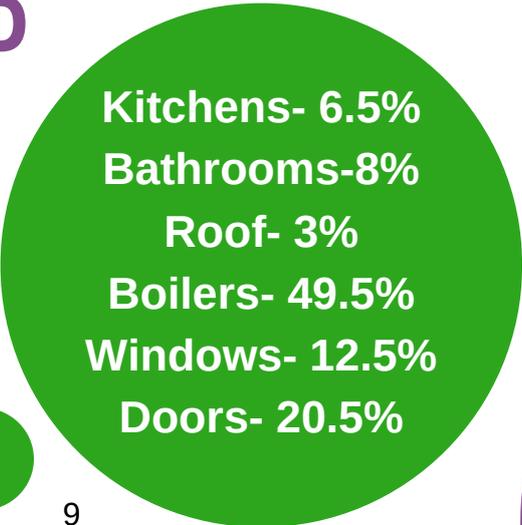


# INVESTING IN OUR HOMES

Each year we invest a significant amount of money to enhance and improve Unity homes. In 2023/24 we invested £3.1m in routine and planned repairs.



# TYPES OF PLANNED MAINTENANCE WORKS



# REPAIRS

Last year the budget for responsive repairs was £567,000 however we ended up spending £983,000 and we completed a total of 4869 repairs. This is an average cost of £202 per property.

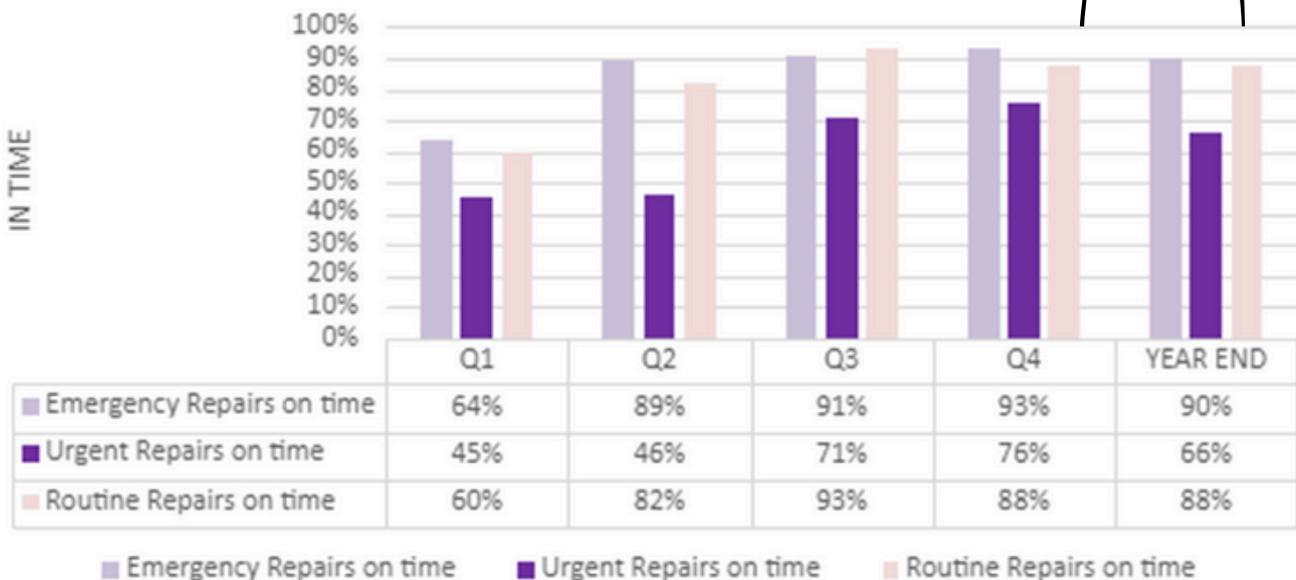
The average completion time was 12.6 days, which is better than the target of 13 days. However, only 88% of routine repairs were completed on time.

Our repairs performance improved as the year went on. 67.9% of customers told us that they were satisfied with the repairs service they had received in the last 12 months, and we are committed to improving our service. While trying to get the best from the current contractor, we are working with tenants to make improvements to what we and they do, and we are also involving them in the procurement process for a new contractor which will start in April 2025. With resident input we expect to appoint a contractor who will fully meet tenant expectations.

**“REPAIRS WILL ALWAYS BE THE MOST IMPORTANT SERVICE AREA FOR MOST CUSTOMERS AND WILL ALWAYS BE WHERE WE SPEND THE MOST MONEY.”**



REPAIRS PERFORMANCE





# BUILDING SAFETY

Keeping properties safe involves conducting safety checks on appliances and systems to protect you against hazards caused by gas, electricity, fire, legionella, lifts, water, asbestos, carbon monoxide and lifts.

We carry out inspections to identify problems and undertake works to guarantee your home is safe and of high quality.

## Our Performance

- 100% Gas- LGSR**
- 100% Electric- Certificate**
- 100% Fire Risk Assessments**
- 100% Asbestos**
- 100% Water - LRA**
- 100% Lifts - LOLER**



## Sustainability

In 2023-24, we made sustainability a high priority due to the increasing costs of energy. We installed 99 boilers in homes that needed them the most and conducted inspections to evaluate the energy efficiency of the existing insulation.

The average SAP rating for our homes is 74.3. Our goal is to further improve the energy efficiency of our homes and achieve an Energy Performance Certificate rating (EPC) of C for all homes by 2030.

# SERVICE PERFORMANCE

## Antisocial Behaviour

We received 24 reports of new cases of anti-social behaviour during the 2023/24 financial year. All the people complaining of ASB were contacted within 5 days and this triggered the start of our investigations. After our intervention ASB ceased in 100% of cases, we took enforcement action on 1 case, and 26 cases were closed in the year. 74.2% of tenants surveyed are satisfied with the way we handle ASB. This is good performance in comparison with others. Here is a breakdown of the types of **ASB reports**.

## Antisocial Behaviour Types Of Reports

- 1 Youth/Children- Nuisance
- 1 Youth/Children- Harassment
- 5 Verbal Abuse/Harassment/Threat
- 3 Nuisance from Vehicles
- 2 Other Criminal Behaviour
- 1 Drugs
- 10 Noise (Including Music)
- 1 Vandalism & Damage to Property

**24 Total**

## Tenant phone calls

Last year we received 47,904 phone calls. This equates to an average of 921 per week and 184 per day. We answered **89%** of them within six rings, **11%** were abandoned. While this is **6%** off the target of **95%**, we know this is lower than the actual because calls were being dropped by the system. In February we upgraded the internet to resolve this problem and initial results since show much improved returns.



## Services Enquiries

We believe we are good at dealing with your enquiries. **77%** of them received by our customer service team were answered first time.



## Estate services

**79.7%** of tenants feel that communal areas on estates are clean and tidy, and the grounds are well maintained.



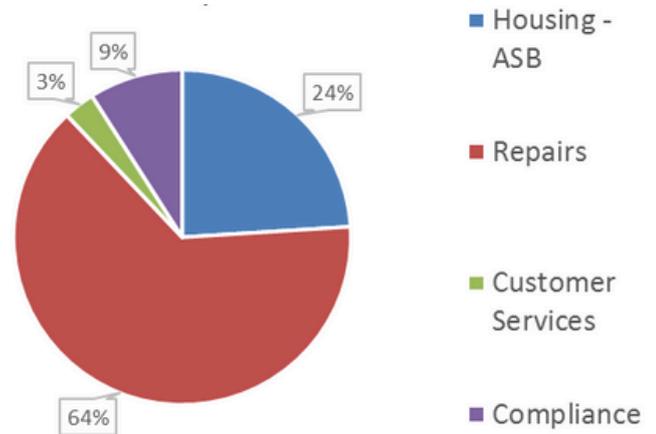
## Complaints

When we receive feedback and complaints from customers, it helps us to understand what has worked well and allows us to put things right to continuously improve our services.

In 2023/24 we received a total of 34 complaints, down from 42 the year before. Most other landlords have experienced an increase fuelled by the increased powers of the Housing Ombudsman, the revised Complaints Handling Code, which raises expectations and standards in service delivery and some high-profile cases in the media.

We have risen to the challenge redesigning our complaints handling process and involving residents and members in the appeal process.

% of Complaints



While we have seen only slight improvement (44.1%) in tenant satisfaction with how their complaints were handled, service performance has improved considerably in the year. 94.1% of all stage 1 complaints were responded to on time.



# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT



## Community Engagement

Our Social purpose drives our work to make a positive contribution to local neighbourhoods and the people who live within them. Hence the focal point of our work is to support and enable local people to improve their economic prospects.

	2023/24	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21
No. of local people we helped to find employment	178	198	148	103
No. of local people we supported into training and/or education	274	256	233	200
No. of local people we encouraged to volunteer	22	15	15	26

## SETTING UP YOUR OWN BUSINESS

Our **unique selling point** is supporting and enabling BME People to set up their own business. This initiative started in the late 1999 when Unity acquired the Unity Business Centre and began renting out low-cost business units to people intending to start a business. We now have 160 units in and around the Chapeltown area, and 66% of the entrepreneurs who rent from us are BME. In addition to good quality units, we also provide a wide package of support and assistance to help tenants whose businesses are struggling, to get back on their feet.



Many of our BME tenants have overcome barriers to get to a position where they can rent a unit. We also run several Steps to Business courses in conjunction with People Plus. Most notably last year we ran courses for ten inmates at HMP Wealstun. Other business courses to highlight



3 Steps to Business workshops over a condensed 4-day course, with 45 cohorts attending

Developed and successfully applied for funding via WYCA to run the Breaking Barriers pilot course to empower marginalised female entrepreneurs in digital media and marketing.

Facilitated a woman's business course called Be Unstoppable

## Tenant involvement

Our aim is to involve and engage more tenants and residents than ever before by increasing both the range and depth of opportunities to participate. In the year we held twenty different events, and more than 322 tenants took part. This was 20% up on last year, albeit just falling short of the targets we set ourselves. We involved more tenants and more often in service design with a view to improving our service offer.



You have told us our biggest weakness was not having more regular activities. They tended to be intermittent. For instance, the training and implementation of Estate Inspectors and a mystery shopping regime was successful, but it was not sustained. A more robust regime will commence in 2024/25.

- Introduced new communication channels
- Set up four new tenant groups
- Held several focus groups on a variety of Unity Services
- Co-produced the repairs policy
- Consulted and involved residents in the procurement of the repairs contract.
- Met eight times to consult with the Tenant Scrutiny Group
- Undertook consultation of the new website, the internal audit process, and the development of the new asset management strategy.
- Review of building safety compliance and policy and procedures

# FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

In 2023/24 Unity had a group turnover of £8.98m and a surplus of £514k. Clearly, the economic environment in which we operate remains uncertain and this has adversely affected delivery of our Corporate Plan. However, despite the rent cap, we have retained our strong financial position and resilience to manage the financial risks arising from the current operating environment.

Our good financial performance is evidenced through retaining G1/V1, our detailed business plan stress testing and performance on our Value for Money Metrics.

We are also in a strong place to meet new challenges facing us, such as the revamped consumer standards, enhanced regulation and improving the quality of homes notably through enhanced energy efficiency and a proposed new regulatory decency standard.



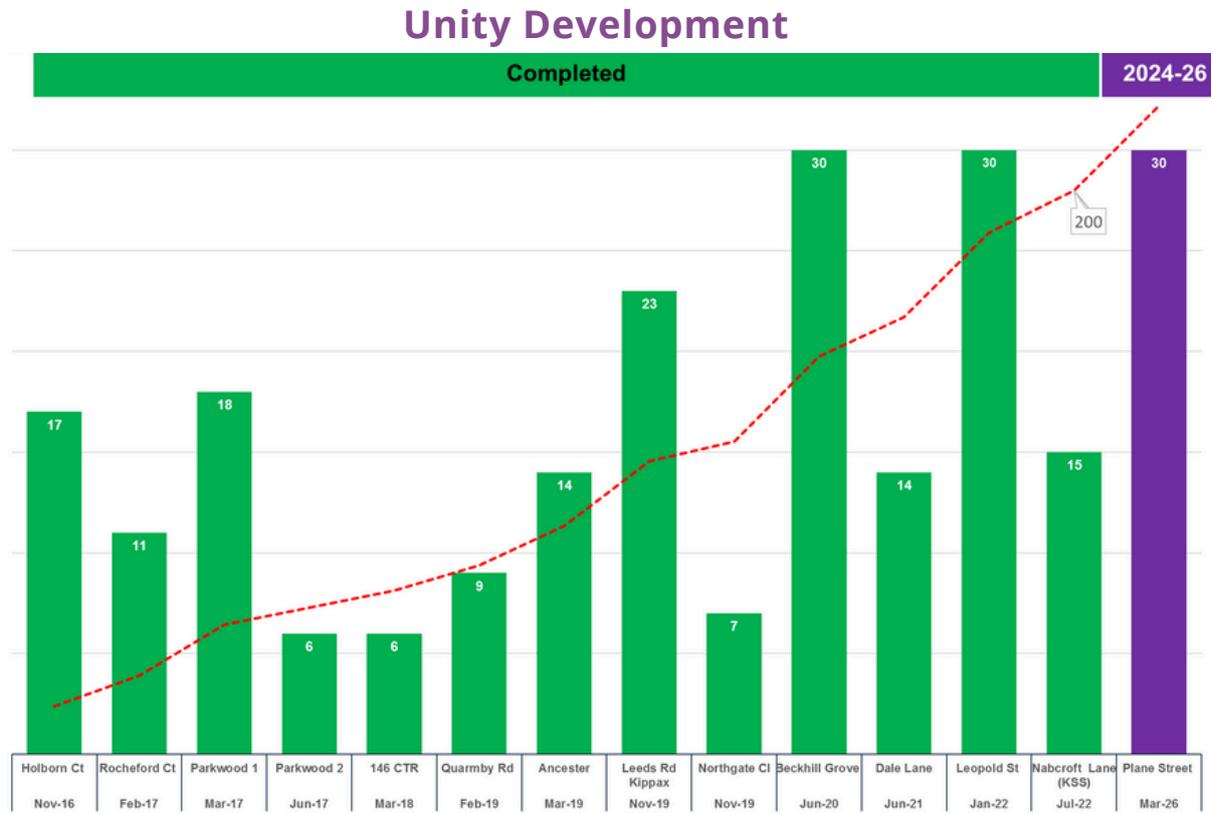
**“Our properties are being reasonably well maintained and we have the financial capacity to meet their maintenance needs.”**

## Stock Condition

The recent surveys found only **0.5%** of Unity dwellings do not meet the Decent Homes Standard. This is 7 properties and work is in hand to address them. No properties were identified as failing the Decent Homes Standards on Disrepair, Modern Facilities or Thermal Comfort.

## Development

The table below shows how we have used Unity's capacity to invest in developing new homes.



Over the period of our corporate plan, **2021-27** the target is to own or manage 1410 homes. We are on track to achieve this with 1388 homes owned and 5 managed for others, currently and a pipeline of 52 units.

Notwithstanding that **2023/24** was a very difficult year for new build development for the sector, mainly due to cost increases and the financial vulnerability of contractors. For these reasons we failed to start two new build schemes, and despite a huge effort, we are not sure either scheme will go ahead in **2024/5**, though this is what we are working to achieve.



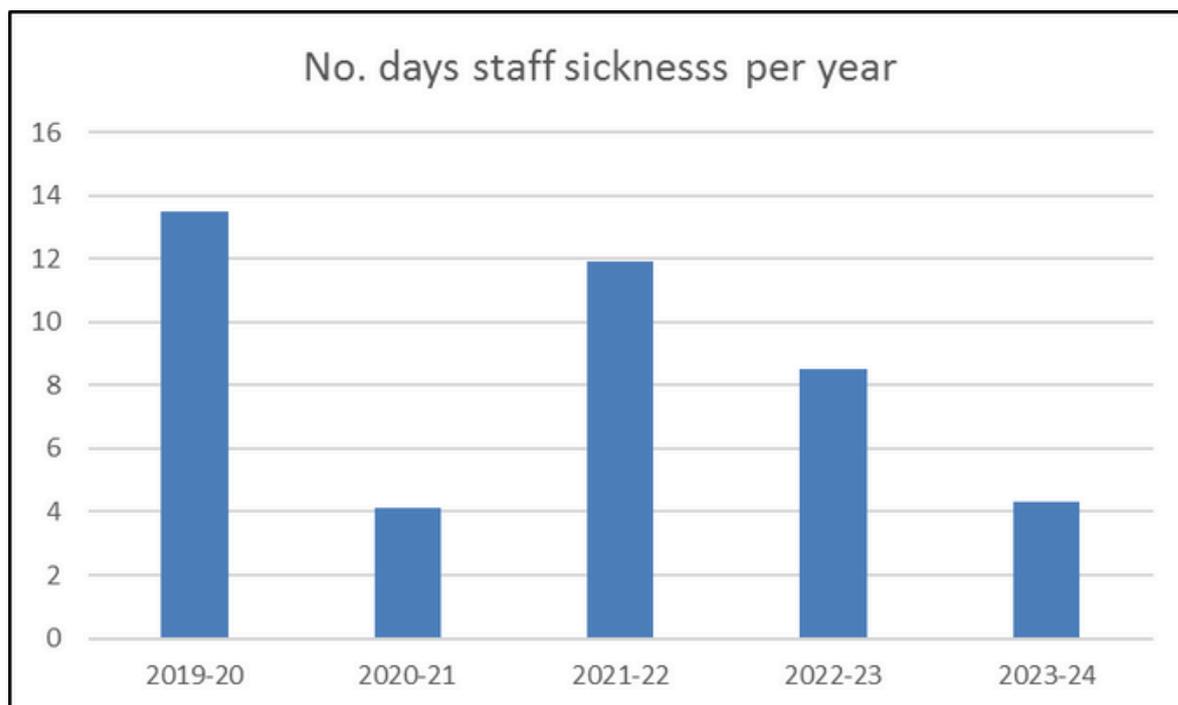
# INVESTING IN OUR TEAM

Unity is a BME organisation and amongst other things we want all tiers to reflect the diversity of the local community we serve. Hence, we are proud to show that 49% of Staff, 67% of UHA Board and 75% of UE board are BME. Moreover 50% of UHA board and Senior Management Team are women.



Core to our success is our ability to attract, retain and inspire outstanding people. We continue to attract people with different backgrounds, different perspectives, and different lived experiences. These differences help ensure that we have a variety of perspectives, observations and insights that are critical to drive the innovation and creativity.

During the year we focused on staff wellbeing, introducing various initiatives to support colleagues mental, physical, and financial wellbeing. These included supporting staff with paid counselling and coaching, adjusting working patterns and upgrading screens to aid eyesight. As a result, we saw staff sickness absence improve in comparison with the previous year.



## THE STAFF

We recognise the benefits of having a highly skilled and motivated team and have invested in training colleagues this year on key areas such as Damp, Mould and Condensation, Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Equality and Diversity and performance management. We are keen to work with others to procure cost-effective training and an example of this was partnering with Leeds Beckett University in conjunction with 54 North Homes and Connect Housing to access Institute of Leadership and Management training courses and webinar workshops for women. We more than doubled the target of 1.5 training opportunities per person. The introduction of a skills matrix will help to target training more efficiently and effectively next year.

During the year we offered short term opportunities to local people and school children to gain work experience and skills. This programme will continue next year too, Unity tenants will be given priority so if you know anyone who is interested contact us. The details are on the back page. We are proud to be a Living Wage employer and we recognise the benefits of appropriate pay and benefits.

Our quest to be a creative and innovative organisation got a shot in the arm when we won two national awards and reached the short list for various others across a range of disciplines



*Northern housing award team of the year. Employment and Enterprise*

## THE BOARD

Board members remain suitably skilled and effective. We have completed an annual Board appraisal exercise and our subsidiary Board and Standing Committees have undertaken an annual assessment of their effectiveness. No significant issues have arisen because of these reviews, although we continue to strive to improve Board effectiveness. Working together with the Senior Management Team we updated key policies including sickness, disciplinary, capability and grievance to give managers better tools to manage.

**“Be on the lookout because we will be recruiting for new Board members and a Board chair early next year. ”**





Supporting BME Communities  
and Multi-Cultural Neighbourhoods

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**INVESTORS IN PEOPLE**  
We invest in people Standard