

Providing housing choice
Improving life opportunities
Addressing inequalities



News

Autumn 2013

Kids step up this summer

Unity's estates are looking great, thanks to their younger residents.

This summer saw a host of activities where young people had fun making improvements to their streets.

Over in Burmantofts, the Kimberleys kids took part in an art workshop run by community artist Alan Pergusey (right) to revitalise the square's mosaic. The new panels that they created will be fitted this autumn.



Some of them also joined in on gardening workshops run in Kitchener Street, where neighbours benefitted from free plants and advice from Tanya & Jonathon from the Back to Front project.



Over in Leicester Close, green-fingered youngsters transformed a bed of bare earth into a scented garden, planting sage, rosemary, mint and a beautiful rose.



And Jaswanie Campbell, Meanwood, did such a good job of learning how to prune his mum's shrubs that we let him keep the secateurs as a reward!



We had great fun getting out and about this summer, meeting such helpful and well-behaved children. If you would like to see something like this in your neighbourhood, please get in touch.

What's on in Autumn

Your chance to have your say

Communal gardening drop-in session

1 pm, Tuesday 15 October

Tenant Panel meetings

1pm, first Tuesday of the month

Kimberleys mosaic - fitting the new panels

End October

Kitchener Street gardening workshop

4pm, Thursday 3 October

Service charges for communal gardening

October & November

For more events and detailed information, turn to page 9.

Your right to hold Unity to account

Along with this issue of *Unity News*, you can also read our 'Annual Report to Tenants' for April 2012 - March 2013. It is your yearly guide to how well Unity's doing as your landlord, and what we're doing to give you the service you have the right to expect.

Our Tenant Panel asked us to keep the report short and snappy, but if you want more detail, our 28-page 'Self-Assessment 2012-2013' is available on our website and has all the performance information that you could ask for.



Local Welfare Support Scheme

The Government has abolished Community Care Grants and Crisis Loans for living expenses.

If you have an emergency and need some financial support (e.g. budgeting loans and short term budgeting advances), you can contact the DWP on 0845 608 8590 for initial help. If the DWP cannot provide support, the council may be able to instead.

Leeds City Council has set up a Local Welfare Support Scheme to support people who need emergency assistance. They can provide basic household goods and emergency help, but do not make cash payments.



The Local Welfare Support Scheme is not available to everyone, just the most vulnerable. These include the following, if they are facing 'exceptional' circumstances.

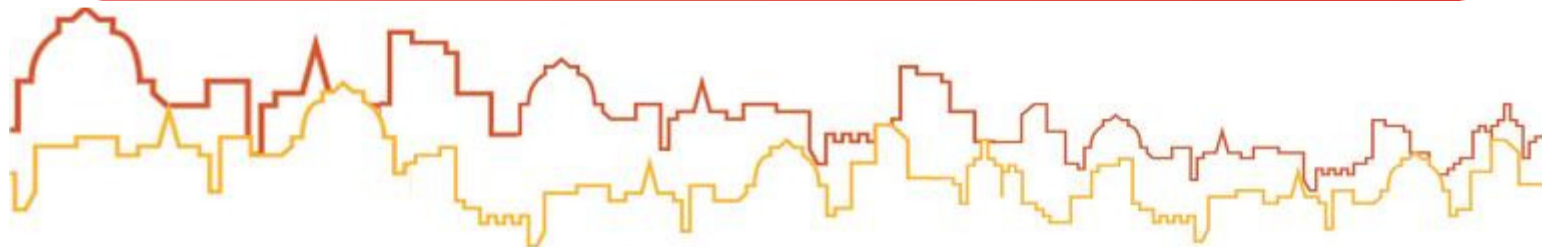
- Families or vulnerable people (e.g. with mental health problems) who are under exceptional pressure.
- Homeless people or rough sleepers.
- Vulnerable older people.
- People fleeing domestic violence.
- Young people leaving care or living independently.
- People moving out of institutional or residential care into the community.
- Ex-offenders leaving prison or detention centres.
- People with disabilities.

Applications to the scheme should be made by a support worker to improve your chance of success. Call our Financial Inclusion Officer, Clive Greenwood, on 0113 200 7753 to see if he can help. You can call the scheme direct on 0113 376 0330, but will be more likely to get help with Clive's assistance.

Easy ways to pay rent - find the best way for you

You'll need an Allpay card to pay over the internet, by text or at PayPoint outlets. Please call us on **0113 200 7700** to order one.

- **Direct debit.** Weekly, fortnightly, monthly - whatever suits you the best. It changes automatically when your rent changes, so it's the easiest method. Call us to set one up.
- **Standing order.** You're in control with this method, but you have to amend it every time your rent or benefit levels change.
- **By phone:** Call us to pay by debit or credit card.
- **At our office:** Pay with cash, cheque, debit card or credit card.
- **Paypoint outlet:** Use your Allpay card to pay by cash or card.
- **Online:** Go to www.unityha.co.uk and follow the links. You'll need your Allpay card.
- **Mobile text:** Register on the Allpay website at <https://www.allpayments.net/textpay>



Job vacancies with the Employment Team

Are you looking for work?

Vacancies

Retail outlets have started advertising their **Christmas vacancies**. Our Employment Team has details of all the latest vacancies, to save you from spending hours looking for them yourself. They can also breathe life into a tired old CV and make your application forms sparkle.



Christmas vacancies - a good way to impress an employer

Construction placements

There will be employment and training opportunities for local people on our development sites at Brown Lane East (Holbeck) and Stratford Court (Chapel Allerton).

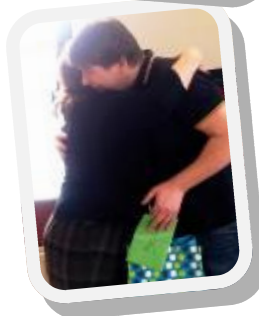
Get in touch now if you're interested, or go to the jobs fair (see right). These are quality placements which often lead to permanent work .

Upcoming training...

GOALS workshops, aimed at building your confidence and giving you direction.

Digital Inclusion: help with general computer skills, getting online and using the internet.

If you would like to hear more about these opportunities, please contact our Employment Team on 0113 200 7738.



Make sure you're protected!

Our low-cost home insurance gives you additional protection for all those Christmas gifts.



It's an unfortunate fact of life that we're coming up to a peak period for damage or theft of your possessions.

As the central heating system goes on, slow leaks can get faster. Frozen pipes can burst, flooding your home, and thieves are on the look-out for a seasonal bargain.



Protect yourself with our affordable home contents insurance. Call us on 0113 200 7700 now for a free, no-obligation information pack.

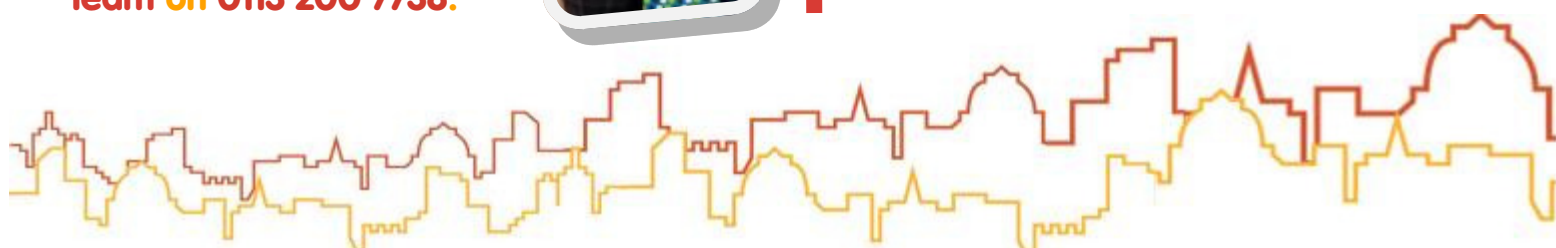
The National Housing Federation's home contents insurance scheme - now even cheaper for Unity tenants

Construction Jobs Fair

2 - 7pm, Monday 21st October, St Matthew's Community Centre, St Matthew's St, LST1 9NR

Keepmoat, Unity's developers for our new Brown Lane East development, will be at a local jobs fair this month, giving local people the chance to apply for quality work placements and training.

Construction & Housing Yorkshire, Employment Leeds, CITB and Leeds College of Building will be there to take names and details of those that are interested in the opportunities available.



£321,346 in rent arrears... what would it pay for?

Why are we quick to get in touch about rent arrears? Because rent pays for your home improvements.

This is the total amount of rent and service charges owed to Unity by tenants and shared owners on 8th September 2013 - almost a third of a million pounds.

£321,346 would pay for....

80 homes with completely new double glazing

92 new kitchens

161 replacement bathrooms

428 new showers (one for every Unity home that needs one)

1285 metres of metal fencing

2678 garden gates (more gates than Unity has properties!)



Double glazing - **£4,000** for an average home



New kitchen - **£3,500** including new flooring



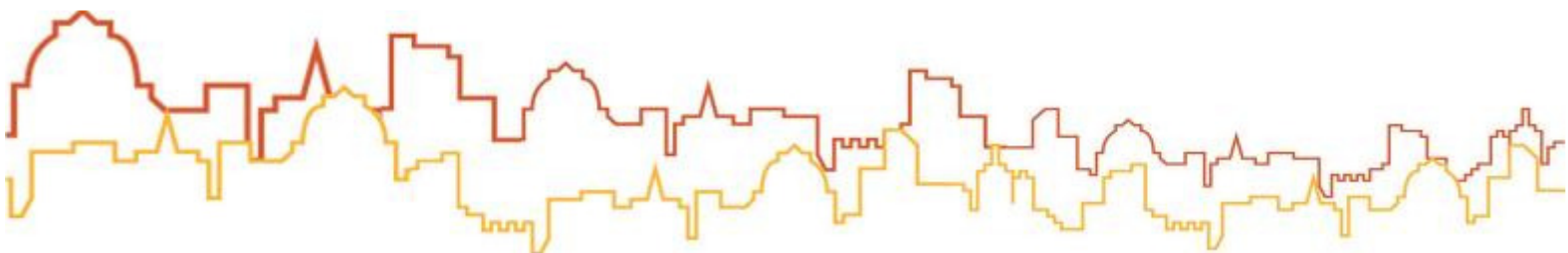
New bathroom suite - **£2,000** including shower, tiles and floor



New over-bath shower and tiling - **£750**

Some tenants have asked why Unity is being so proactive about contacting tenants when they have missed rent payments, when so many people are struggling with benefit cuts. The fact is, if we don't make sure that we support our tenants when their rent arrears are low, they can build up large debts. If they can't pay these debts, we have less money to spend on our properties, which affects everyone else too.

Our tenants expect Unity to have the money to replace their fixtures & fittings when they get old, and we are determined to meet our tenants' expectations.



Unity's Financial Inclusion Officer, Clive Greenwood, is a familiar face to many of our tenants. He's been kept busy in recent months, helping a lot of people avoid the underoccupation housing benefit cuts, but is also looking at other ways to help save you money.

If you're struggling with debt or worried about your financial future, you can talk to Clive.

Clive Greenwood

Financial Inclusion Officer

T: 0113 200 7753

E: clive.greenwood@unityha.co.uk



Cheaper home contents insurance: Quite often I hear about tenants who are upset after a water leak, because they can't afford to replace treasured possessions. As Unity isn't liable to replace water-damaged items, we encourage everyone to take out insurance instead.

We recently looked at our contents insurance deal and realised we can make it cheaper. As a result, we have taken advantage of MY HOME scheme provided through the National Housing Federation (a body which represents housing associations) to get you cheaper contents insurance.

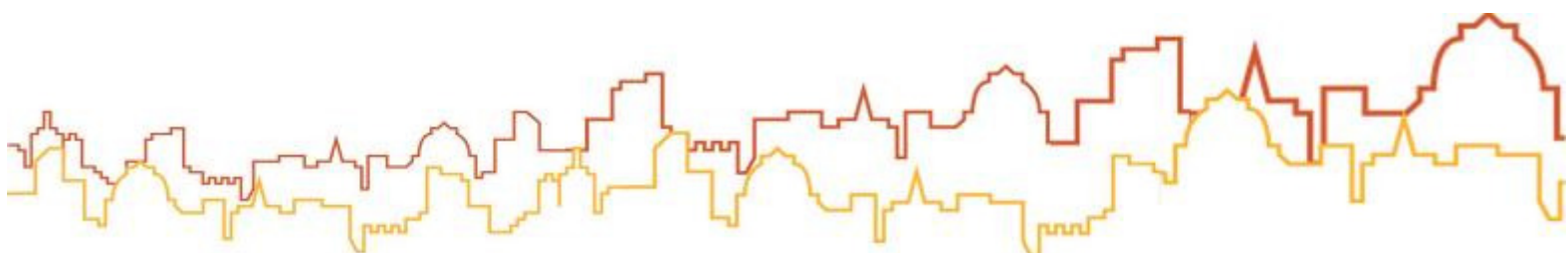
All our current scheme members will automatically be converted to the cheaper rate but will keep the same level of cover that they have always had.

Having affordable contents insurance is important for when something unfortunate happens and you just can't afford to pay out for something new. If you don't have any insurance already, I strongly recommend that you talk to us about our recommended scheme.

Benefits update: We are several months on from the introduction of the changes to Housing Benefit and Disability Living Allowance, and the Benefit Cap has started. A lot of our tenants have been affected and others are telling us that their hours have been cut at work.

The consequences of these changes can be very difficult, if not disastrous. Please remember that we can help you by giving benefit advice, employment support, and budgeting advice. You might be surprised by some of the more obvious things we can help you with that you may not have thought of. Just call **0113 200 7753** to speak to me for more advice.

Home swapshops: Many of our tenants are looking for a mutual exchange, so we're representing them by running a stall at the mutual exchange swap shops being held by the council. Details of the next event are on our website. If you would like more information on these events or would like your property to be advertised, please call our Customer Services team on **0113 200 7700**.



Save on your bills with the



With the colder nights coming in, this is the ideal time to check your tariff and get on to the cheapest one. But switching suppliers can be really complicated and it can be confusing trying to find the best deal.

To save you the job of shopping around, Martin Lewis, a well known consumer expert and presenter, has started the 'Cheap Energy Club'. It will help you to find the best gas and electricity deal to save money on your bills, without spending loads of time on the internet.

To register, get hold of your latest gas and electricity bills and log onto www.cheapenergyclub.com. The site will quickly find you the best tariff. But the best bit is that they check your rates automatically each month and email or text you to let you know when you're no longer on the best deal - you don't have to check at all!

1 Find you the cheapest deal



We'll do a full market comparison to check if you're overpaying on your current deal. If not great - if you are, we'll help you switch

2 Constantly monitor your tariff



Then each month, without you doing anything, we'll do a background comparison to check you're still on the cheapest tariff - in case yours has risen in price or others fallen

3 Alert you when it's time to switch again



When the time's right for you to switch based on your current tariff and preferences, we'll alert you and show you the best deals

Tony's tips

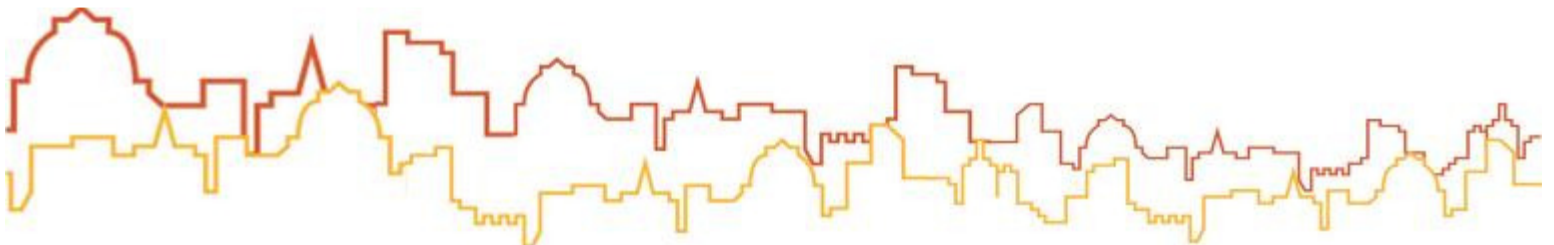
Maintenance man Tony has a word



Are you elderly or disabled? Do you struggle to use your bath?

If you're on Unity's waiting list for a shower, you could get one quicker if there's a medical reason why you need one. It's easy to do - just ring the council or pop into your local one-stop-centre and ask them for an Occupational Therapist assessment. They'll visit you at home and see what you need, then let Unity know.

Just call the council on 0113 222 4401 to book an appointment with an Occupational Therapist, then see what they say.



New gardening contract - have your say now

If you pay a gardening service charge, this is your chance to affect the service you get.

If your home shares a landscaped area or car park with other tenants, then you pay a service charge to maintain it. The contract has been held by the same company for four years, Lex UK Ltd, and we have managed to hold costs at the same level. However, it's time to renew the grounds maintenance contract for the next five years.

This is our chance to make changes to your gardening service, to tailor it to local needs. To find out what you want, we've listened to what our tenants have liked and disliked about the service, looked at our satisfaction data, organised inspections of all our communal areas by trained tenants and consulted with our Tenant Panel. The feedback tells us that you'd rather have a good, basic, low-cost contract which keeps your rents down, so this is what we're aiming for.

We're looking at making the following changes to the new gardening contract.

Service	What the contract says now	What tenants asked us to change
Shrubs & hedges	Two cuts a year (one in spring, one in autumn)	Shrubs & hedges need cutting back when they get overgrown or obstruct paths. Cut them when they need it, not at a set time.
Car parks	Litter-picking every two weeks	This is expensive and puts rents up. Tidy up car parks every few months, not every fortnight, and make the rent cheaper. If tenants care about their environment, they'll pick up the litter themselves.
Private gardens and yards	Some tenants in flats pay for gardens that they can't access	If only one tenant can access a garden or yard, then it's unfair to expect everyone else to pay for it to be looked after. We want to make those areas the responsibility of the tenant who uses them.

We're writing to everyone who will be directly affected by the proposed changes, to check what they think about the new arrangements. However, if you'd like to speak to someone in person or have your own ideas about the new contract, please come to our drop-in session to have your say.

Gardening service drop-in session

Tuesday 15th October
1.00 - 2.30pm, Unity's office

See the plans for your area.

Suggest ways to make your service cheaper.

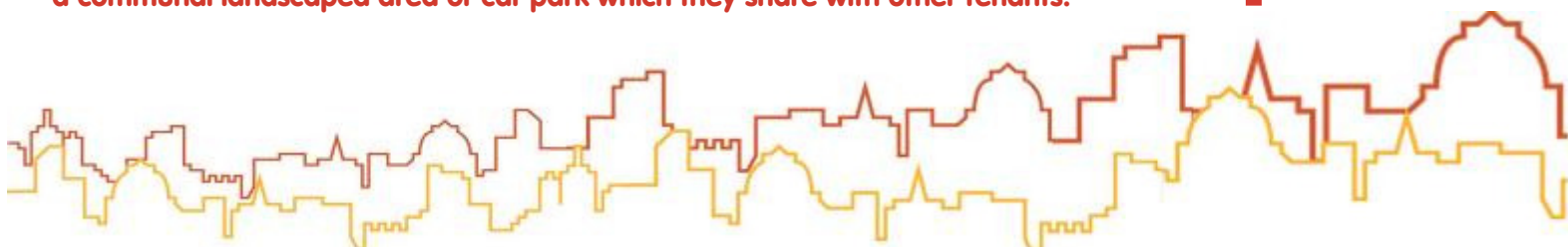
Ask for a change to the gardening service at your home.

Please note, this drop-in session is not for tenants who only have a private garden. It is only for tenants who pay a service charge for the gardening or maintenance of a communal landscaped area or car park which they share with other tenants.

This issue's **£50** repairs satisfaction slip prize draw winner is Mrs Long from Gipton.



If you have a repair, send your slip back and you could win **£50!**



Brown Lane East, Holbeck - November 2014

A mixed development of 42 houses and flats, for rent or sale through shared ownership



Work starts on site this month, building 42 new, energy-efficient homes for rent and sale.

- 18 x 2-bed flats
- 18 x 3-bed houses
- 6 x 4-bed houses

Our development is spearheading the regeneration of the wider Holbeck area, which is primed for investment under a PFI deal.



Before: derelict land *After: modern houses & flats*

Stratford Court, Chapel Allerton - December 2014

Turning outdated bedsits into new 1 & 2-bed flats and 2-bed bungalows for rent and sale



Demand is sure to be high for our new North Leeds homes, which combine modern design with green features. The site retains its mature trees and the development will have cycle-parking for 14 bikes, helping to reduce traffic on Chapel Allerton's busy roads.

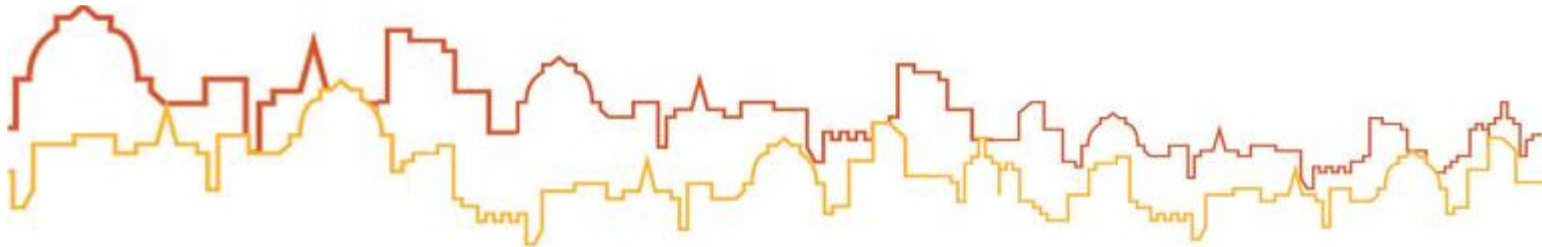


Before: out-of-date bedsits.

After: attractive flats to rent or buy at low cost.

Are you interested in getting your foot on the housing ladder with one of our affordable homes? Want to get the latest news on purchasing opportunities at Brown Lane East or Stratford Court? Please call our Customer Services team on (0113) 200 7700 to register your interest in buying a home.

If you are interested in applying for a rented home on Brown Lane East or Stratford Court, you do not need to contact us. The properties will be advertised in the Leeds HOMES flyer in Summer 2014.



If you want more say in where you live and the services you get, join Unity's **Tenant Panel**.

Our friendly, informal meetings are held on the first Tuesday of every month. They're your chance to meet with managers, influence strategy and change things where you live.

Recent Tenant Panel activities

Unity's Tenant Panel members have been getting involved in scrutinising Unity's performance in all sorts of areas.

- Asking for **Unity's Regeneration Director, Wayne Noteman**, to explain Unity's approach to room sizes, rents and design on new developments.

"Wayne's presentation was really good. We understand more about why staff & tenants don't always get everything they want in a new development, because of all the compromises that have to be made."

- **Scrutiny Panel Chair**, tenant **Belinda Letham**, spoke at Unity's AGM at the Hamara Centre in Beeston. Chief guests were **Neil Evans, Director of Environment & Housing** for Leeds City Council and **Mark Burns Williamson, Police & Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire**. Both men shared their concerns about how government cuts and the Welfare Reforms could create instability and uncertainty in the communities where Unity's tenants live.
- Working on **Unity's grounds maintenance contract**, working out how we can cut costs to keep service charges down.



Next Tenant Panel meeting dates

- **Tuesday 1st October, 1 - 2.45pm @ Unity's offices**
- **Tuesday 5th November, 1 - 2.45pm @ Unity's offices**
- **Tuesday 3rd December, 1 - 2.45pm @ Unity's offices**

To find out more, contact **Emma Oates, Unity's Tenant, Neighbourhood & Involvement Officer**, on (0113) 200 7743 or at emma.oates@unityha.co.uk.

Recent events

Fielding Gate Mews, Armley

Well done to residents who got together to tidy up the paved area at the entrance to their close. By looking after it themselves, they keep their rents lower.



Scott Hall Square - no orchard

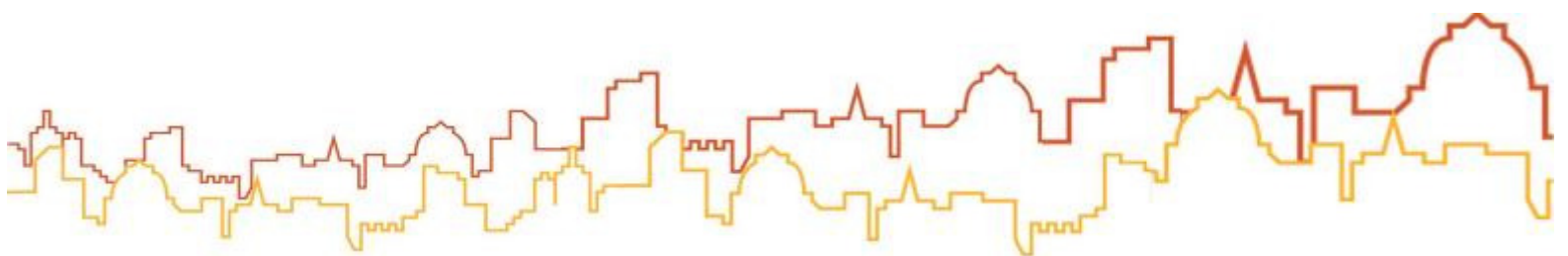
Unfortunately, **plans for a community orchard have had to be cancelled** after extensive consultation with residents. Local people had too many genuine concerns about vandalism and security.



Meanwood Olympics

Woodhouse Cricket Club hosted the **Meanwood Olympics** this summer. In four weekly sessions, up to 120 children enjoyed activities like football, basketball, dancing, zumba and tug-of-war.

Unity staff ran a stall offering advice on housing, employment and welfare. It was an excellent event and our thanks go to Unity tenant, **Mark Jackson**, who helped to organise it.



Our housing officers check all our homes every three months. They'll be happy to call in at your home so that you can show them any problems in your area. If you want your housing officer to call on you on their next visit, please call us to arrange.



Rashpal Sahota

Additional languages:

- Hindi
- Punjabi

Friday 1st November	Burmantofts & others: Haslewoods, Rigton Green, Glenthorpe Crescent, Leopold Street, Ashton Court
Friday 8th November	Chapelton: Jackie Smart Court, Louis Street, Cowper Street, Dodgson Ave, Hillcrests, Frankland Place, Granges, Hamiltons
Friday 15th November	Chapelton: Harehills Ave, Newtons, Pear Tree House, Windrush Court
Friday 6th December	Chapelton: Spencer Place, Markham Avenue, Vicars Road, Gathorne Terrace, Pasture Road
Friday 13th December	Beeston: Harlech Park Court, Beverleys, Joy Row, Rington Road, Burlington Road, Lodge Lane, The Grange
Friday 11th October	Little London: Devon Close, Leicester Close
Friday 18th October	Woodhouse & North Leeds: Cliff Terrace, Unity Close, Deighton View, Blackmoor Road, Fir Tree Approach
Friday 25th October	Meanwood: Stainbecks, Bentleys, Stonegates

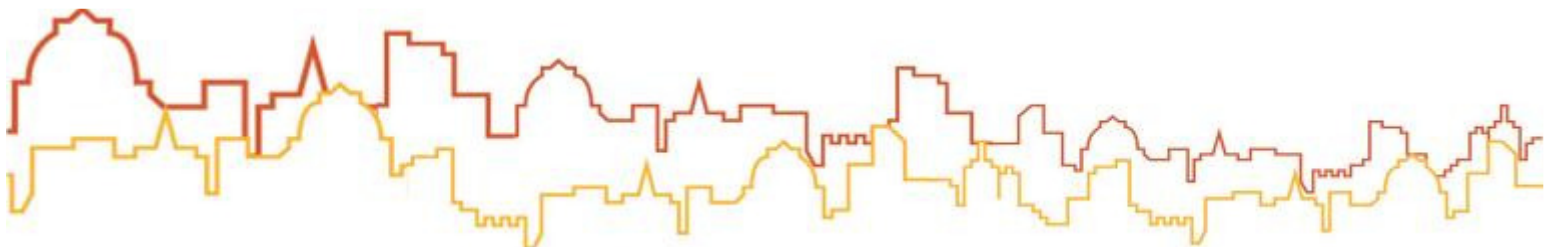


Kamila Maqsood

Additional languages:

- Urdu
- Mirpuri

Friday 1st November	Harehills: Copgrove Road, Ryan Place, Upland Gardens, Fearnville Road, Montague Avenue, Lawrence Gardens, Dorset Road, Ruthven View, Luxor Road, Cowper Grove
Friday 8th November	North Leeds: Scott Halls, Fieldhouse Drive, Pennythorne Drive
Friday 15th November	Harehills: Ponderosa Close, Hill Top Mount, Ellers, Alcesters, Bayswaters, Bexleys, Elford
Friday 22nd November	Beeston: Parkwoods, Stratfords, Sefton Terrace
Friday 29th November	Hyde Park & Armley: Rosebank Crescent, Hessele Road, Royal Parks, Tagore House, Mitford Road, Model Avenue, School Mews, Wesley Road, Fielding Gate, Mistress Lane, Highfields, Reyden Mews
Friday 6th December	Crossgates & Harehills: Thorn Drive, Briarsdales, Nowells, Kitcheners, Kimberleys, Pooles, Maryfields, Thornfield Way
Friday 13th December	Chapelton: Sholebrokes, Mandela Court, Olorika Court, Chapelton Road, Mexboroughs, Reginalds



“I don’t want to rent for the rest of my life. What are my options for buying my own home?”

Our Tenant Panel thought that Unity tenants needed a clear update on what their options are for home ownership, as government schemes aimed at social housing tenants change.

For more information, please see our leaflets, available from our office or on our website.

Option 1: Buy your Unity home under ‘Right to Acquire’

Some Unity properties can be bought by their tenants under the *Right to Acquire*. You get a £10,000 discount off the market price. There are clear rules about which homes can be bought and which tenants can qualify, but they are quite complicated. As a rule of thumb, you may have the Right to Acquire if all the following statements apply to you.

- Your home was built or refurbished using a housing grant allocated after April 1997.
- You need to have been a social housing tenant for at least two years (if your first social housing tenancy started before 18th January 2005) or at least five years (if your first tenancy started later).

To find out if you qualify, write to our Finance Manager asking if you qualify for the ‘Right to Acquire’.



Option 2: Shared ownership

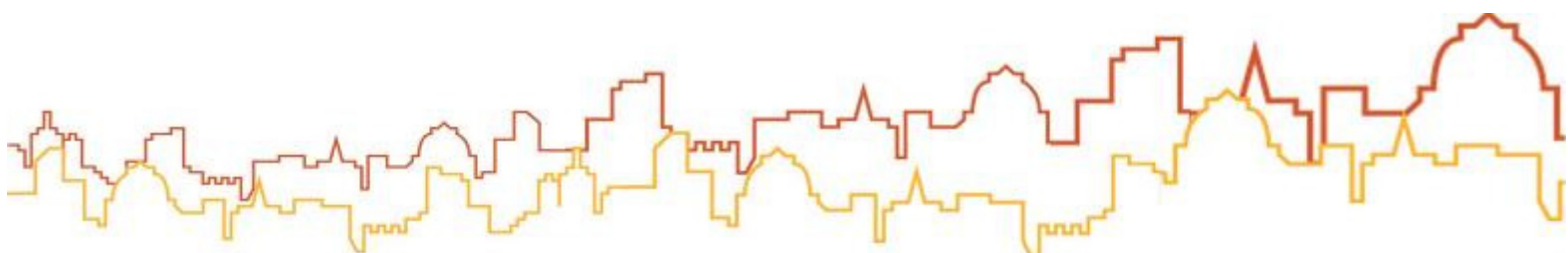
Shared ownership is a government funded scheme aimed at helping ‘first time’ buyers get on to the property ladder. The scheme lets you buy a share of a property, meaning you don’t have to apply for a full mortgage. This increases your chances of being accepted by a bank or building society. Some shared ownership schemes are on a part-buy/part-rent basis, so you will have to pay a low rent on the share of the property that still belongs to Unity.

The share that you can buy varies with each scheme. Usually, you start off by buying at least 50% of the property and can buy more when you can afford it. When you want to move, you can sell your share. If it has gone up in value, you keep the profit. However, if house prices have gone down, you could find yourself in negative equity.

Shared ownership is aimed at people who cannot usually afford to buy on the open market. If you already have a home or are on a higher income, you will not qualify for the scheme.



Our next shared ownership schemes are at Brown Lane East and Stratford Court. Please call us on (0113) 200 7700 if you would like us to send you information updates on them.



Useful information

Contacting Unity

T: (0113) 200 7700

F: (0113) 200 7701

E: uha@unityha.co.uk (general)

repairs@unityha.co.uk (repairs)

W: www.unityha.co.uk

Office hours:

Monday 9am - 5pm

Tuesday 9am - 5pm

Wednesday 10am - 5pm

Thursday 9am - 5pm

Friday 9am - 5pm

If you have an emergency repair when the office is shut, please ring our emergency repairs numbers (see below).

If we have to change our emergency numbers 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 & leaks, total loss of water and electricity, only toilet is blocked)

Emergency gas repairs ☎ 01757 244 510

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

Transco (gas leaks) ☎ 0800 111 999

Leeds City Council services

These are the contact numbers for the council services that you are entitled to.

Adult social care ☎ (0113) 222 4401

Anti-Social Behaviour ☎ (0113) 222 4402
onestop@leeds.gov.uk

Children social care ☎ (0113) 222 4403

Council tax, housing benefit ☎ (0113) 222 4404
lcc.benefits@leeds.gov.uk

Complaints & compliments ☎ (0113) 222 4405

Environmental services ☎ (0113) 222 4406
Refuse collection, recycling, noise nuisance, pest control, grass cutting, graffiti removal, dog wardens
refusecollection@leeds.gov.uk

Highways ☎ (0113) 222 4407
Street cleaning, street lighting highways@leeds.gov.uk

Registrars ☎ (0113) 222 4408
Births, deaths & marriages

Planning ☎ (0113) 222 4409

Minicom ☎ (0113) 222 4410

Contact the council's environmental services on (0113) 222 4406 to get bulky waste items taken away for free - old furniture, carpets, boxes, bagged rubbish.



Homes & Enterprise

Supporting BME Communities
and Multi-Cultural Neighbourhoods

Unity Housing Association
113-117 Chapeltown Road
Leeds LS7 3HY

STOP HATE CRIME
0800 138 1625
24 HOUR HELP LINE

**Unity's office is a Hate
Incident Reporting Centre**

