

Providing housing choice

Improving life opportunities

Addressing inequalities



Supporting BME Communities and Multi-Cultural Neighbourhoods

# News

## Spring 2014

# Legal loophole brings in over £12,000 for tenants

### 14 households benefit from 'bedroom tax' claw-backs

Quick-thinking Clive Greenwood, Unity's Financial Inclusion Officer, saw an opportunity when he was reading a welfare-rights article. He realised that some of our most longstanding tenants might be exempt from the 'bedroom tax' for underoccupation, and put in applications for 28 households.

Clive was overwhelmed with how successful his appeals were.

*"14 of our tenants have been awarded a total of £12,344 in extra housing benefit, which has made an astounding difference to their lives."*

The government has now closed the loophole.

Clive is now appealing for people affected by the 'bedroom tax' to get in touch with him before the March 31st deadline for applying for a Discretionary Housing Payment for 2013/14.

**"I'm so happy - I can't believe it."**

**"When I received the letter, I was so relieved. I went to get my pension and didn't have to spend it on this awful 'bedroom tax' for once."**



## Tariff switching and bills debt advice session

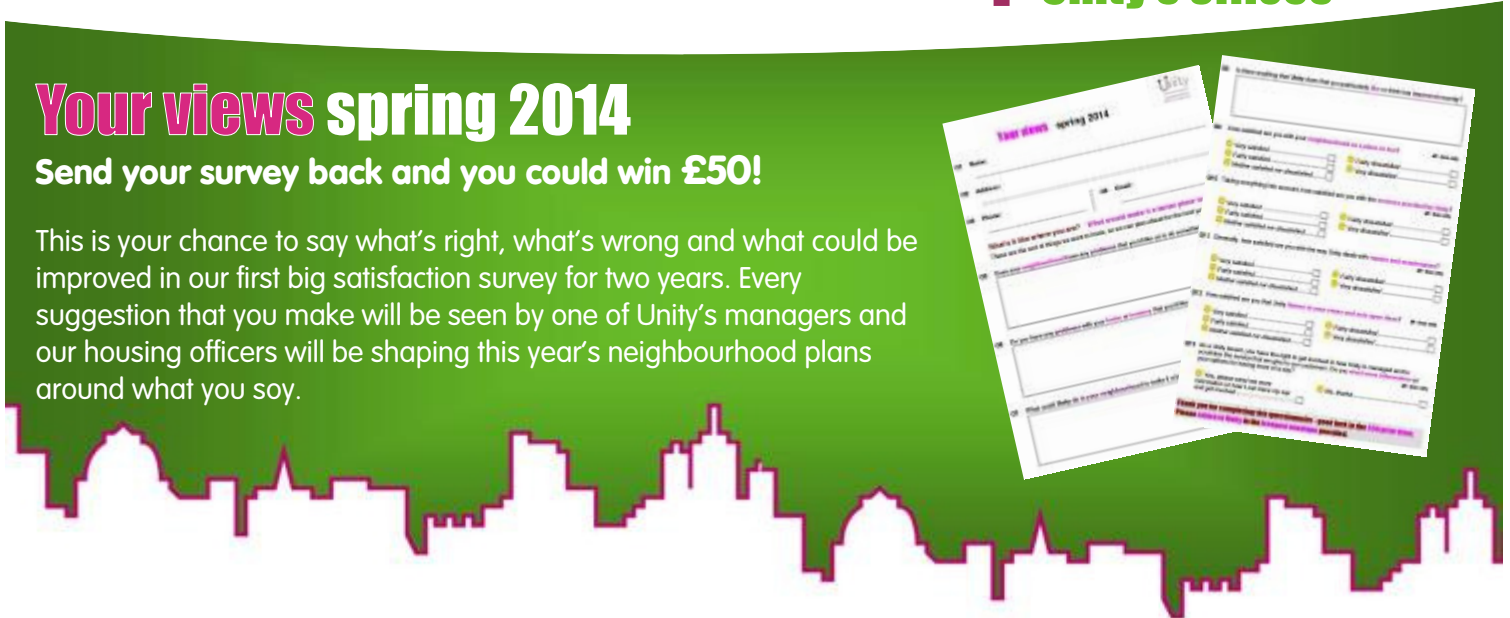
- ◇ Do you want to get free advice and help on switching to the best gas & electricity tariff for you?
- ◇ Do you want to know if you qualify for a 'Warm Homes Discount'?
- ◇ Do you have gas or electricity debts? You might qualify for a grant to reduce them.

**Drop-in session, 1pm Monday 31st March, Unity's offices**

## Your views spring 2014

Send your survey back and you could win £50!

This is your chance to say what's right, what's wrong and what could be improved in our first big satisfaction survey for two years. Every suggestion that you make will be seen by one of Unity's managers and our housing officers will be shaping this year's neighbourhood plans around what you say.



## Pay by standing order? Change it for April!

Your rent changes every April, so if you pay by standing order, you need to make sure that you've told your bank to change your payment to the new amount. If you pay by **Direct Debit**, we'll do it for you.

This is how you work out your monthly rent payment. If you have agreed to pay a bit extra every week towards your rent arrears, just add it to your weekly rent. Then do the calculation.

$$\text{£ Weekly rent} \div 7 \times 365 \div 12 = \text{£ Monthly rent}$$

If you pay your rent monthly, it is due *in advance*. Your rent account should always be in credit (CR) and should only dip into arrears (DR on your rent statement) on the week that you pay your rent. This is what your rent account should look like - in credit (CR) most of the time and only dipping into arrears (DR) on the week that you pay your rent.

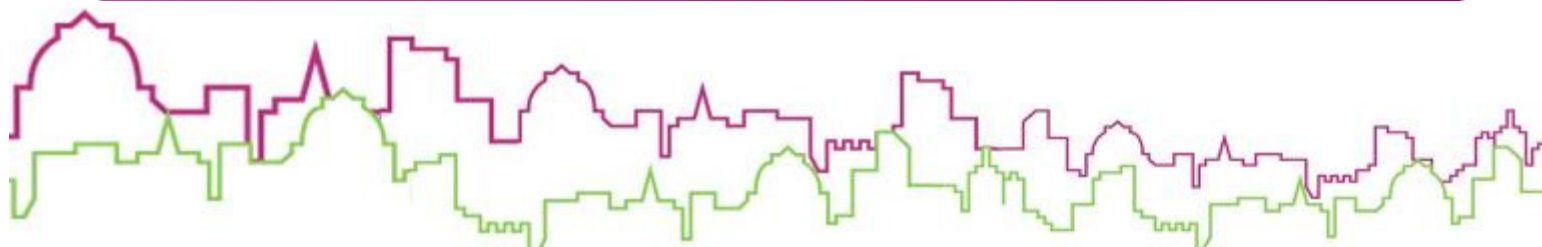
Date	Description	Charge	HB Rec'd	Payments	Balance
9/12/13	Amount due	83.09	0.00	0.00	26.66 CR
16/12/13	Amount due	83.09	0.00	0.00	56.43 DR
17/12/13	All Pay			-361.05	304.62 CR
23/12/13	Amount due	83.09	0.00	0.00	221.53 CR
30/12/13	Amount due	83.09	0.00	0.00	138.44 CR
6/01/14	Amount due	83.09	0.00	0.00	55.35 CR
13/01/14	Amount due	83.09	0.00	0.00	27.74 DR
17/01/14	All Pay			-361.05	333.31 CR



## 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](http://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>



## Unity's Tenant Panel gets money spent

Our dedicated group of tenants has been choosing where to splash the cash.

Our Tenant Panel has been helping to spend our Scheme Improvements budget by identifying their top priority areas.

Residents in Spencer Place have them to thank for tidy new bin areas, and Ashton Court has attractive new planting.

Other work includes compact and ornamental trees at Briarsdale Mews and they're looking at ways to give tired beds in Leicester Close a fresh make-over.

**Tenant Panel meetings: 1st Tuesday of every month.**

**Call Emma on 0113 200 7743 for more information.**



## Local labour builds new homes

Unity's new Brown Lane East development is giving work and training opportunities to local people. Five out of ten placements have already been filled and Unity staff will be working with Keepmoat to maximise the employment opportunities in the area.

The trainees will be working on our new Brown Lane East homes, which are due to be ready for rent and purchase under shared ownership in December 2014. There will also be employment opportunities at our Stratford Court development in Chapel Allerton.

**Interested in shared ownership opportunities in Holbeck or Chapel Allerton (over 55's)? Call (0113) 200 7700.**

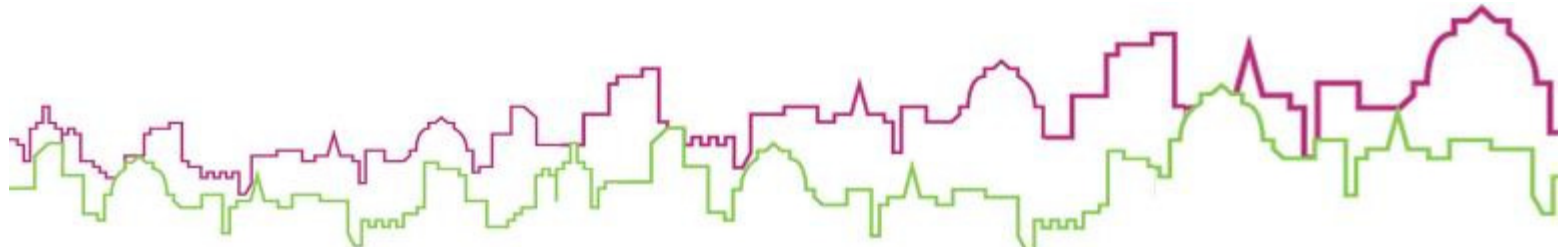
**Want to find out about employment opportunities on our new developments? Call (0113) 200 7738.**

*Pictured: local trainees (front row); pupils from Ingram Road Primary school (who suggested names for the development's flats); Cllrs Richard Lewis & Adam Ogilvie; members of the Holbeck Neighbourhood Forum; Keepmoat staff; Ali Akbar & Wayne Noteman from Unity.*

**New drop-in advice session** Want to know how to move home?  
Need rent payment or housing benefit advice? Come to our drop-in sessions!

**Wednesday afternoon from 2 - 4pm.**

**Friendly advice on moving home and paying rent - no appointment needed.**





# 04 New staff team in Housing

## Unity's new, expanded Housing team is there to help and support you in your home.

We've changed the way we work, to give you a more specialised service.

The recent recession and the Government's Welfare Reforms have put a lot of financial pressure on our tenants, which means that a lot of people need more support than ever before. Because of this, we've changed the roles of our Housing Officers and have brought in a new position - Income Support Officer. Together with our Financial Inclusion Officer, they will provide the extra support that our tenants need to pay the rent that pays for the repairs and improvements to your home.

### The housing team and what they do



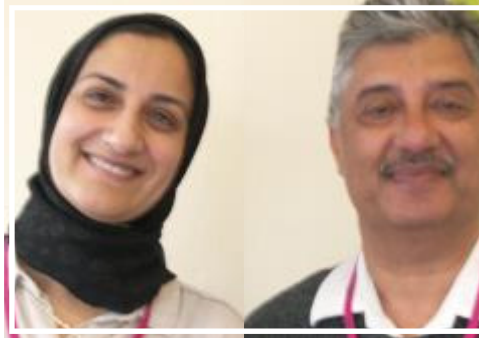
#### Income Support Officers - Sam Mnyama & Matt Hull

Rent collection, arrears agreements, court action, recharge debts

Sam Mnyama (left) is a well-known face to Unity tenants. He started off on a work experience placement and has worked his way up since then.

Matthew Hull (right) comes to us from the council's Benefit Fraud team. With over 10 years in benefits, his considerable knowledge will help Unity tenants to get the maximum help.

Sam covers Kamila's patch and Matt works on Rashpal's. However, they'll work together to make sure that people are seen as quickly as possible.



#### Housing Officers - Kamila Maqsood & Rashpal Sahota

Estate management, anti-social behaviour, neighbourhood issues

Kamila Maqsood (left) and Rashpal Sahota (right) continue in their role as housing officers, but no longer deal with rent arrears. This will leave them free to tackle more neighbourhood issues and to take a stronger line on tenancy enforcement.

To see who your housing officer is and when they're next in your area, turn to page 10.



#### Housing Assistant - Chris Law Lettings

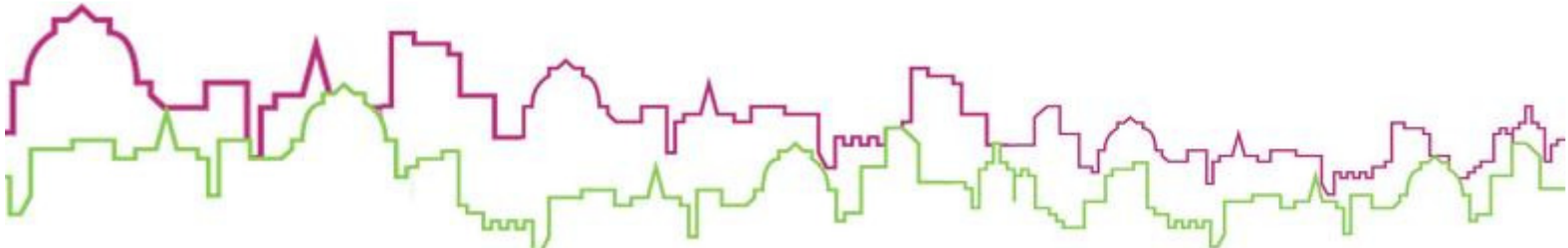
If you want to move home, talk to Chris.



#### Financial Inclusion Officer - Clive Greenwood

Support, debt advice

Struggling to pay rent and bills? Clive will get you back on track.



## More Unity tenants benefit from free, fun and interactive IT training

Sign up for a free IT course and learn the computer skills you need

Unity is working in partnership with Connect Housing to deliver our own tailor-made IT training to tenants. The once-a-week course, lasting 5 weeks covers everything from using the mouse and sending and receiving email.

The course is suitable for anyone looking to improve their computer skills, no matter what age you are. We now have access to more IT equipment so we can hold bigger and better classes. Over 30 people have attended the course since October and we are looking to help even more!



*"I've learnt not to be afraid of the computer, and to treat it as a valuable tool for everyday living."*

*Ms G, Meanwood*

If you feel that you could benefit from some free, fun and interactive IT training, why not book a place on our next course? Call Kelly on 0113 200 7738 or Noma on 0113 200 7746.

## Do you have an amazing business idea?

Unity can offer you free business coaching and set-up advice

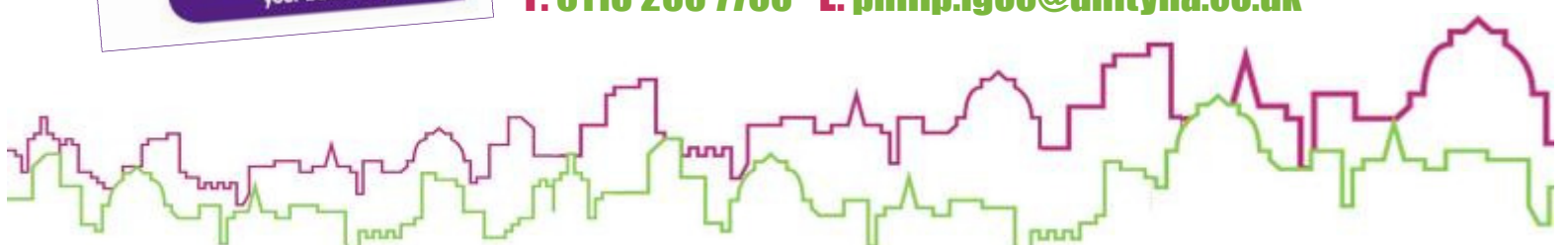
Unity Enterprise is launching an exciting new initiative to provide business advice to local people and organisations, paid for by European Regional Funding.

As well as helping with the practicalities of setting up a new business, we can help you with your existing problems. Struggling with keeping on top of your book-keeping? Nervous about making returns to the tax office? Taking on staff? Need to find affordable work or office space with the services a small business needs?

If you feel that instead of you managing your business, it is running your life, call Philip Igoe for help in tackling the difficulties and finding workable, lasting solutions.

**Interested? Talk to Philip Igoe at Unity Enterprise.**

**T: 0113 200 7700 E: [philip.igoe@unityha.co.uk](mailto:philip.igoe@unityha.co.uk)**



## Cutting your gas, electricity & water bills

These top tips are from Joanne Wilson's recent 'Big Energy' session with our Tenant Panel. For your chance to learn, switch and save - come to Unity at 1pm, Monday 31st March.

### Spread your fuel bills evenly across the whole year.

If you're on a prepayment meter, you can still spread your gas & electricity costs and avoid struggling with higher bills in winter.

Your energy provider will shortly be sending you an annual statement, which tells you how much you paid over the last year. Divide this cost by 12 (or 52 if you want to do it weekly) and budget to put that much on your meter every month/week during the warmer months.







This builds up a credit on your meter, so you can carry on paying that much when the weather gets colder, rather than paying more. And if your energy company puts up its charges, you will have bought more gas & electricity at the older, cheaper prices.



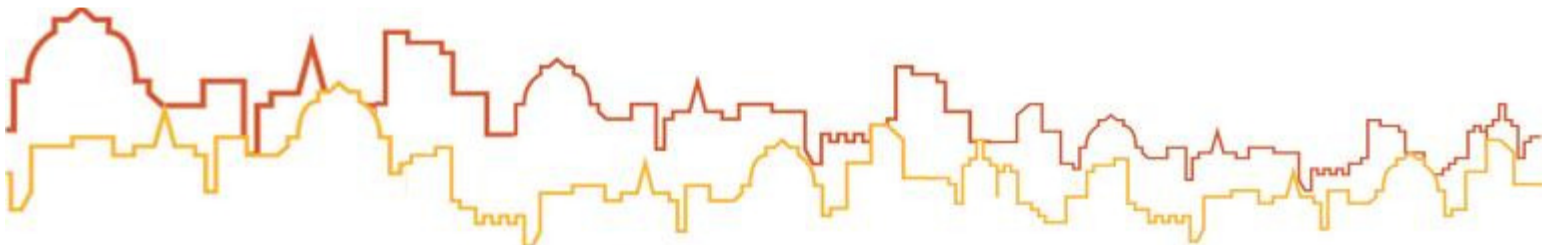
### Don't pay to swap your meters if you don't have to.

Swapping from a pre-payment meter to a credit meter can give you access to cheaper dual-fuel discounts. Some suppliers will charge you for swapping your meter, but some won't.

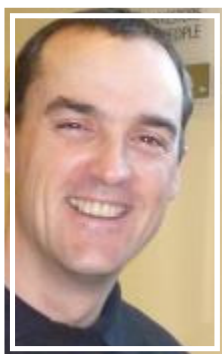
### How much does your utilities provider charge for a meter?

Energy supplier	Meter cost	What are the requirements?	Do you have to stay with the supplier?
	Free	An account review and external credit check. No elec or gas debt within last 12 months. Three years of UK address history.	No.
	Gas: £60 Electricity: £60 Can be free, so ask.	Your account history is reviewed to ensure you won't build up debt. You need to have been clear of debt for 12 months.	No.
	Gas: £62.90 Electricity: £45.91	Your account history is reviewed to ensure you won't build up debt. A credit check is also done. It may ask for a deposit which will be returned in 12 months, with interest.	No.
	Gas: £52 Electricity: £52	A credit check and an agreement to set up a direct debit.	No.
	Free	No credit check.	No.
	Free	An external credit check.	No.

Correct at January 2014. Source: [www.moneysavingexpert.com](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com)







## New handy-person service - £10 per hour

Need a little job doing but don't know anyone who can do it for you? Unity's Handyman, Antony Wilson, is available for hire for small jobs, like fitting a curtain rail, felting a shed roof or putting together flat-pack furniture.

Please call Unity on (0113) 200 7700 to book.



## Tony's tips

Maintenance man Tony has a word



### Want to avoid this?

You wouldn't believe how many homes we visit about black mould, and the first thing we see is wet laundry on the radiators.

Drying clothes on radiators puts all that moisture straight into the air. As soon as it hits a colder wall, it condenses and creates the conditions that black mould loves.

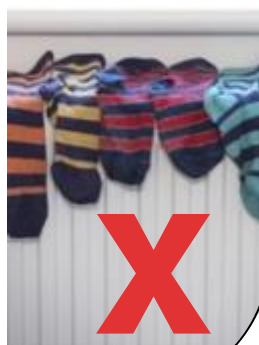
If you don't have a tumble-drier and it's too wet to use the line, use an ailer instead. Open a window to let the moist air escape (or at least open your window vents if you have them).

Or you can get a dehumidifier to remove the water vapour from the air - you'll be amazed how much there is!

**Don't do this!**



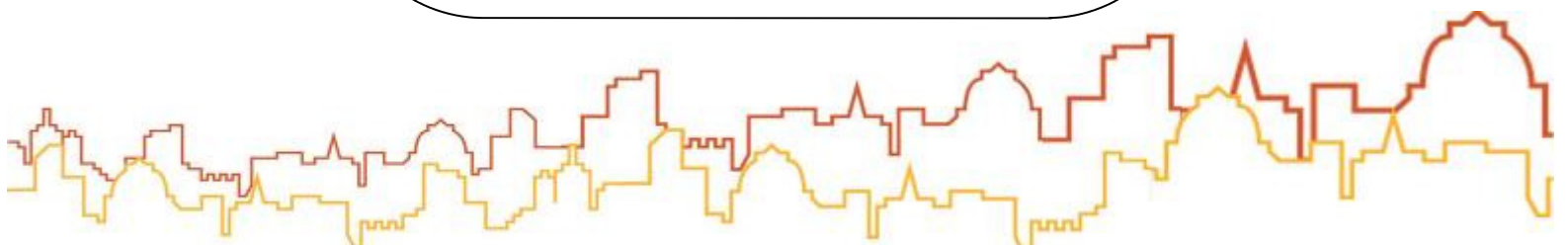
*Drying washing indoors causes*



This issue's **£50** repairs satisfaction slip prize draw winner is **Mr Padmore** from **Chapelton**.



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



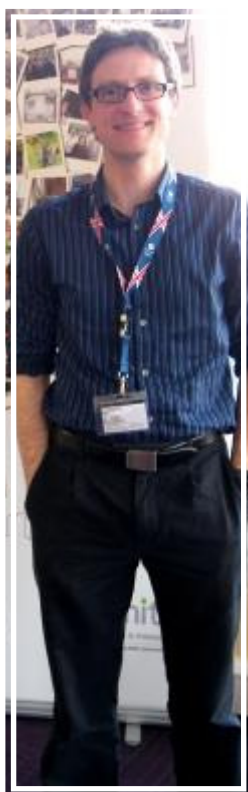
## Are you affected by the 'bedroom tax'?

Even if we couldn't help you before, get in touch to see if we can help you now, before the end of March deadline.

Clive Greenwood, our Financial Inclusion Officer, wants to encourage anyone to get in touch with him if they are still struggling with housing benefit reductions for underoccupation. He explains.

**"There's more and more case law every month, which increases my chances of helping people who originally looked like they wouldn't qualify for help.**

**"I've got a far better chance of successfully supporting tenants than I did a year ago."**



**Clive Greenwood, T: 0113 200 7753, E: [clive.greenwood@unityha.co.uk](mailto:clive.greenwood@unityha.co.uk)**

**"I can't thank Clive enough - if I stick to a payment plan for 12 months, Yorkshire Water will wipe £3,000 off my arrears."**

**I don't just help with rent arrears and benefits - there's a lot I can do to help with your other bills.**

**If you're struggling to make ends meet, call me today to see how I can help you.**

## Is your housing benefit topped up with a DHP?

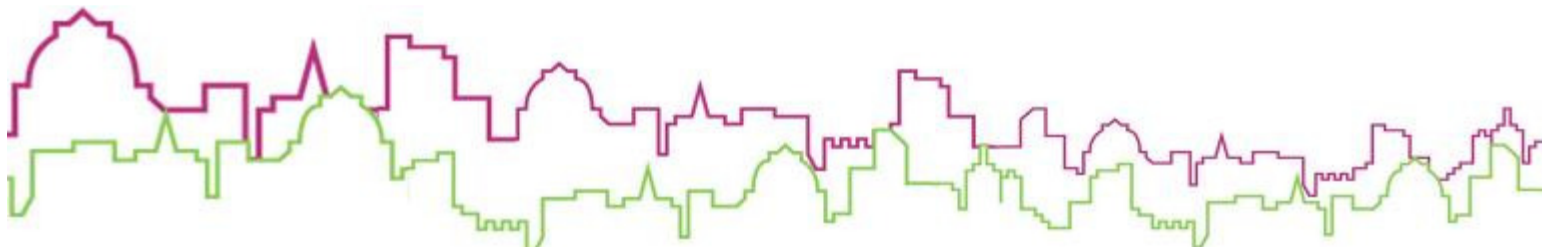
**Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs) have been automatically extended for 4 or 12 months, so you don't have to re-apply yet.**

If you have successfully applied for a DHP, they are only given for a limited period and you need to reapply when they run out. However, the council has now decided to automatically renew everyone's DHPs for 4 or 12 months.

If you are underoccupied and are in one of the following priority groups, your DHP will be automatically renewed for 12 months from April 2014.

- Significantly adapted properties
- Child Access
- Approaching Pension Credit age
- Foster Carers

Anyone else receiving a DHP will get a 4-month automatic extension from April 2014. The council plans to review your case before the end of July and will write to let you know what is happening.





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 questions about support for the victims of anti-social behaviour:** They want to make sure that tenants feel supported and that perpetrators are challenged, so they're conducting a Scrutiny Review into this service.
- **Getting the Maintenance team to do something about broken meter covers.**

*"It doesn't matter how tidy an estate is, when the meter covers are broken and hanging off, it looks awful. We're pleased that Unity's Maintenance team have agreed to replace them routinely when they repaint the outside of people's homes."*

- **Interviewing for the new 5-year cleaning contract and helping to choose which company got the job.**

## Next Tenant Panel meeting dates

- **Tuesday 1st April, 1 - 2.45pm @ Unity's offices**
- **Tuesday 6th May, 1 - 2.45pm @ Unity's offices**
- **Tuesday 3rd June, 1 - 2.45pm @ Unity's offices**

We also hold evening Tenant Panel sessions when there is demand - please call us to ask if you're not free during office hours.

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

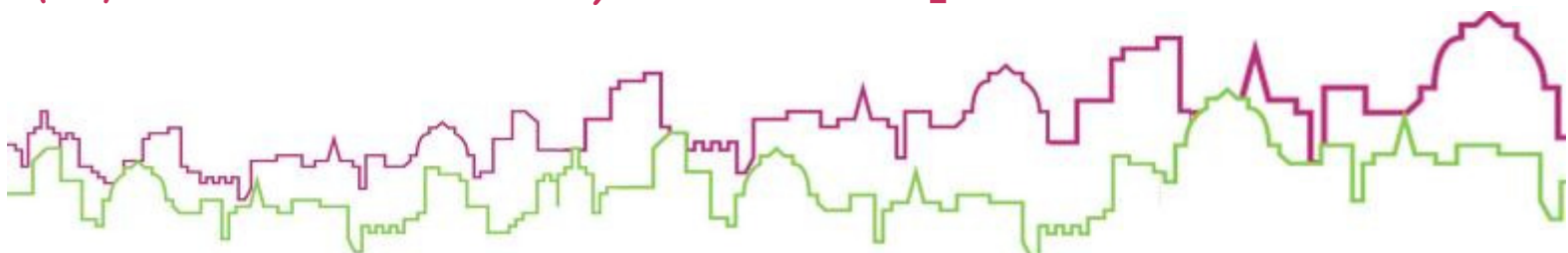
## "What is a 'scrutiny review'?"

All housing association tenants have the right to have their say in what their landlord does. A 'scrutiny review' is one way of checking up on your landlord.

A small group of trained tenants looks at an aspect of Unity's service in detail. They then report their findings to managers.

They have the right to look at Unity's records, interview staff or get real-life opinions from tenants to help them decide what improvements they think need to be made.

If you want to get involved in Tenant Scrutiny, call Emma Oates (contact details below left).



# Housing officers out and about

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

<b>Friday 2nd May</b> 10 am - 1 pm	<b>Burmantofts &amp; others:</b> Haslewoods, Rigton Green, Glenthorpe Crescent, Leopold Street, Ashton Court
<b>Friday 9th May</b> 10 am - 1 pm	<b>Chapelton:</b> Jackie Smart Court, Louis Street, Cowper Street, Dodgson Ave, Hillcrests, Frankland Place, Granges, Hamiltons
<b>Wednesday 14th May</b> 1 pm - 4.30 pm	<b>Chapelton:</b> Harehills Ave, Newtons, Pear Tree House, Windrush Court
<b>Thursday 5th June</b> 10.30 am - 2 pm	<b>Chapelton:</b> Spencer Place, Markham Avenue, Vicars Road, Gathorne Terrace, Pasture Road
<b>Thursday 12th June</b> 10 am - 2 pm	<b>Beeston:</b> Harlech Park Court, Beverleys, Joy Row, Rington Road, Burlington Road, Lodge Lane, The Grange
<b>Wednesday 9th April</b> 1 pm - 4.30 pm	<b>Little London:</b> Devon Close, Leicester Close
<b>Thursday 17th April</b> 10.30 am - 1 pm	<b>Woodhouse &amp; North Leeds:</b> Cliff Terrace, Unity Close, Deighton View, Blackmoor Road, Fir Tree Approach
<b>Thursday 23rd April</b> 1.30 pm - 4.30 pm	<b>Meanwood:</b> Stainbecks, Bentleys, Stonegates

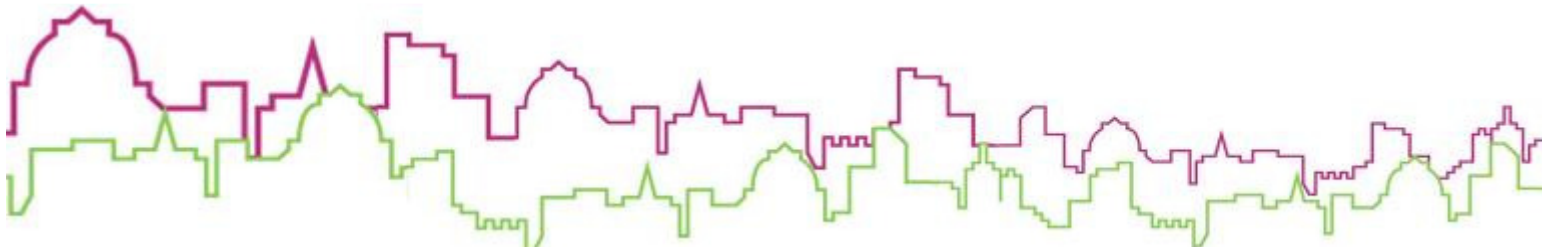


**Kamila  
Maqsood**

**Additional  
languages:**

- Urdu
- Mirpuri

<b>Wednesday 9th April</b> 10.30 am - 3.30 pm	<b>Harehills:</b> Copgrove Road, Ryan Place, Upland Gardens, Fearnville Road, Montague Avenue, Lawrence Gardens, Dorset Road, Ruthven View, Luxor Road, Cowper Grove
<b>Wednesday 16th April</b> 10.30 am - 3.30 pm	<b>North Leeds:</b> Scott Halls, Fieldhouse Drive, Pennythorne Drive
<b>Wednesday 23rd April</b> 10.30 am - 3.30 pm	<b>Harehills:</b> Ponderosa Close, Hill Top Mount, Ellers, Alcesters, Bayswaters, Bexleys, Elfords
<b>Wednesday 30th April</b> 10.30 am - 3.30 pm	<b>Beeston:</b> Parkwoods, Stratfords, Sefton Terrace
<b>Wednesday 7th May</b> 10.30 am - 3.30 pm	<b>Hyde Park &amp; Armley:</b> Rosebank Crescent, Hessle Road, Royal Parks, Tagore House, Mitford Road, Model Avenue, School Mews, Wesley Road, Fielding Gate, Mistress Lane, Highfields, Reyden Mews
<b>Wednesday 14th May</b> 10.30 am - 3.30 pm	<b>Crossgates &amp; Harehills:</b> Thorn Drive, Briarsdales, Nowells, Kitcheners, Kimberleys, Pooles, Maryfields, Thornfield Way
<b>Wednesday 21st May</b> 10.30 am - 3.30 pm	<b>Chapelton:</b> Sholebrokes, Mandela Court, Orlika Court, Chapelton Road, Mexboroughs, Reginalds



# How (not) to leave your home 11

**You wouldn't believe the state that some people leave their homes in!**

If you're planning to move, make sure that your homes is left ready for the next person to move straight in. If we have to tidy up after someone, they get sent the bill, and it gets passed onto a debt collection agency if they don't pay up!

**These real-life photos show our top 5 hates when tenants move out, which have resulted in them getting a nasty bill for the work.**



## 2. Filthy bathrooms

There's gloves and a sponge on this washbasin, but the yellow-stained tiles and scum-covered porcelain show that they haven't been used in a long time...

**What you can do:** Give it a good clean before you go.

## 1. Grubby woodwork

Nobody minds a bit of dust, but woodwork shouldn't be left as dirty as this.

**What you can do:** You have to give us four weeks notice when you move, so use the time to give everything a really good spring clean.



## 3. Pet mess

Leaving cat litter for someone else to clear up? Ugh! And some lawns contain really nasty surprises.

**What you can do:** Clean up after your pet. Check your garden every day and remove any soiling.

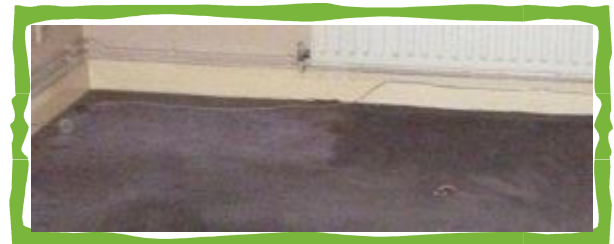


## 4. Gardens full of rubbish

"We've been told to leave the house empty, so we'll just put it all in the garden instead..."

Horrible for neighbours to look at, gets blown across the estate and the council won't take away wet mattresses.

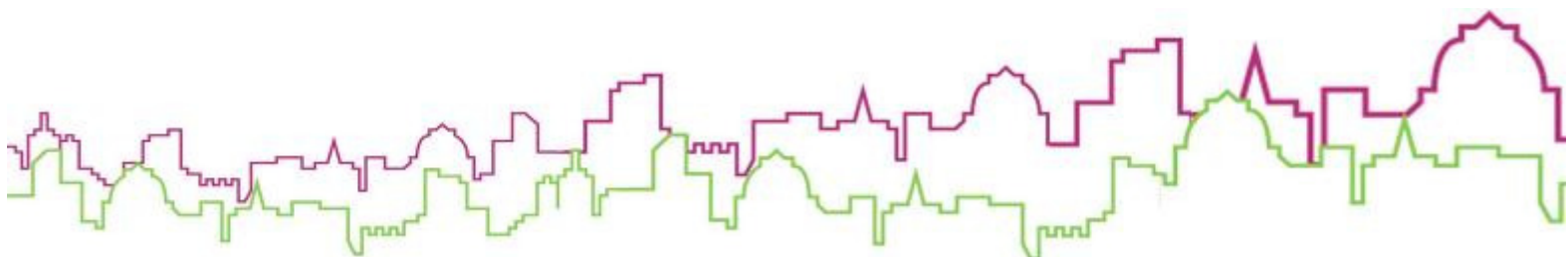
**What you can do:** Planning to move? Think ahead. Work out what you don't want to take with you and use the council's free rubbish disposal service to get it taken away before you move. Call (0113) 222 4406.



## 5. Stained carpets

"The next person can use them."  
Trouble is, it's not a pattern, it's just dirt.

**What you can do:** If you want to leave your carpets in for the next tenant, ask your housing officer. They will check them to see if they meet our standards.





# Useful information

## Contacting Unity

**T:** (0113) 200 7700

**F:** (0113) 200 7701

**E:** [uha@unityha.co.uk](mailto:uha@unityha.co.uk) (general)  
[repairs@unityha.co.uk](mailto:repairs@unityha.co.uk) (repairs)

**W:** [www.unityha.co.uk](http://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](mailto:onestop@leeds.gov.uk)

**Children social care** ☎ (0113) 222 4403

**Council tax, housing benefit** ☎ (0113) 222 4404  
[lcc.benefits@leeds.gov.uk](mailto: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](mailto:refusecollection@leeds.gov.uk)

**Highways** ☎ (0113) 222 4407  
Street cleaning, street lighting [highways@leeds.gov.uk](mailto: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

