

plusdane.co.uk

unity

customer magazine

Plus Dane Housing

Issue 47 | Spring 2024



inside:

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help and support

what can we do

social supermarkets

food shop savings

net zero

improving homes

Hello and welcome to the spring edition of **Unity**

We hope you find the information on these pages useful, and if there's anything you'd like to see in future editions, we'd love to hear from you.

Get in touch at communications@plusdane.co.uk.

inside **this edition**

-  **4 Money matters**
 - Help with Universal Credit
-  **5 Tenant satisfaction measures**
 - Our most recent results
-  **6 Social supermarkets**
 - Savings on your food shop
-  **7 Customer Assurance Panel**
 - The latest news from our CAP
-  **8 Complaints**
 - What happens when you make a complaint
-  **10 Our winter campaign**
 - What we achieved
-  **11 Net zero**
 - Our biggest retrofit project to date





A message from the chair of our Board

Welcome to this latest edition of Unity.

Over the last few months, we have been working on a new corporate plan which will prioritise and direct our work over the next three years. Our current corporate plan was launched in 2021, in the midst of the covid pandemic. While the challenges we face have changed somewhat since that time, we are still feeling the impact that the pandemic had on our services, particularly repairs, and we understand how this has impacted you. We continue to see significant inflation in the cost of building materials, shortage of labour in certain trades and the general uncertainty of this pre-election period.

We are investing a significant amount over the coming months on our repairs service so that we can bring our wait times for non-urgent or emergency repairs down to pre-pandemic levels. 45% of all repairs reported are currently classed as emergency or urgent and we continue to respond to them within the published timescales.

As part of developing the new plan, we spoke to over 1600 customers to understand their views on what our priorities should be, and it was reassuring to see that these aligned to what Board considered the key areas of focus for the organisation moving forward.

The main challenge people are facing at the moment is the cost-of-living crisis, so it is not surprising that ensuring our homes are safe, comfortable, warm, and cost effective to run rank as the highest priorities among customers, alongside us being able to connect you to appropriate support if you are struggling to make ends meet.

Top 3 spending priorities



Investment in homes planned kitchens, bathrooms etc.



Repairs fixing things when they go wrong but not replacing



Support services to help people stay in their home



Making your home warm and energy efficient

In this area we have increased the support we are offering and are working with a wider range of specialist partners also on hand when needed. For one customer who used the Pocket Power service, they were able to write off a £1,000 water debt and save over £700 by looking at the customer's broadband, phone and energy contracts.

I think there are some real opportunities over the course of the next three years for us to demonstrate how we are listening to customers and improving our services as a result, and I look forward to sharing the new corporate plan with you after March.

Sir Peter Fahy, Chair,
Plus Dane Housing

Sir Peter Fahy was a police officer for 34 years, including five years as Chief Constable of Cheshire Constabulary and seven as Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police.



UC **Universal Credit** - advance payments

What to do if you are really struggling before your first payment

When you make a new claim for Universal Credit **you will normally receive your first payment 7 days after the end of your first assessment period**. You will then be paid monthly on the same date, unless your payment date falls on a weekend or Bank Holiday.

You can apply for an advance payment of your Universal Credit if you are in financial hardship while you wait for your first payment - for example, if you can't afford to pay your rent or buy food.

Your rent should be paid from the advance payment, as it will be your full monthly amount incorporating both personal and housing elements.

You will need to pay your advance back in instalments from your future Universal Credit payments, or by other means if you ever stop receiving it – for example, from wages or other benefits.

You can apply for the advance through your online account, your work coach, or the **Universal Credit helpline on 0800 328 5644**. You should find out if you have been successful the same day.

Free school meals

Children in reception and year 1 and 2 of primary school are entitled to free school meals, whatever your income. If you receive certain benefits they may be eligible for this to continue throughout junior and secondary school as well. Check your local authority's website for more information on how to apply.



Are you on Universal Credit yet?

By now, if you claim legacy benefits and live in Merseyside or Cheshire you are likely to have received the letter informing you of your managed migration on to Universal Credit and already made the switch.

When your managed migration letter comes through you must take the steps to move to Universal Credit or you may miss out on money you are entitled to.

If you haven't had a letter yet and think you may be better off on Universal Credit, **get in touch with our welfare team** and we can help you calculate the best solution for you.

Every little helps to save

Help to Save is a type of savings account that allows certain people entitled to Working Tax Credit or receiving Universal Credit to **get a bonus of 50p for every £1 they save over 4 years**.

Help to Save is backed by the government so all savings in the scheme are secure. You can save between £1 and £50 each calendar month. **You do not have to pay money in every month**. You can apply through the **Government Gateway portal on www.gov.uk**.



Could your broadband be cheaper?

Social tariffs are cheaper broadband and phone packages for people claiming Universal Credit, Pension Credit and some other benefits. Some providers call them 'essential' or 'basic' broadband. **They're delivered in the same way as normal packages, just at a lower price.**

First, check if your current provider offers a social tariff. You can apply for most tariffs online. If not, **you can switch to one that does**, although you may have to pay a penalty fee to end your contract.



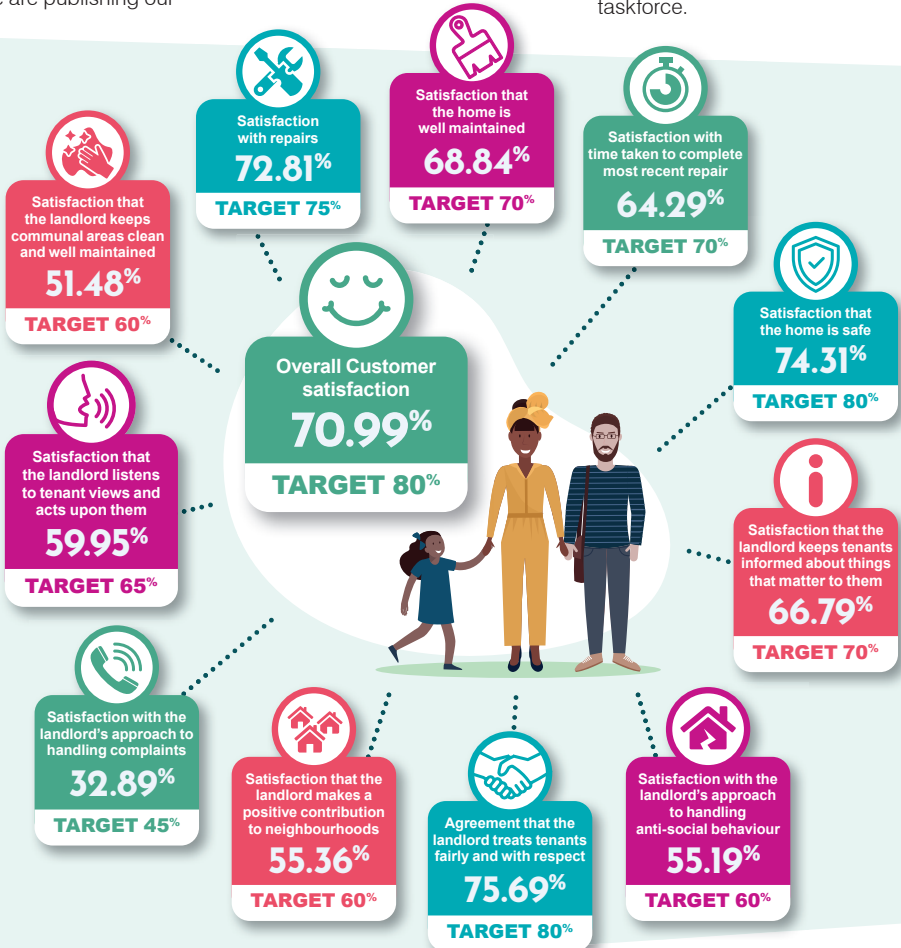
tenant satisfaction measures

The Regulator of Social Housing has created a new system to see how well social housing landlords in England are doing at providing good quality homes and services.

This includes a set of **tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs)** that social housing landlords, including housing associations like us, must report on, once a year. **We want to be open and transparent on our performance** and we are publishing our

TSM results every quarter on our website, in advance of the annual deadline in June. The graphic below shows our results from the third quarter of the financial year (October to December).

As you can see we still have a lot to do to get to target in most of these measures, but we have already put in place **seven taskforces that will help us to improve** in these areas, including Complaints; Damp & Mould, Restructure, Innovation, and a Repairs catch-up taskforce.





all you need to know about **Social Supermarkets**

We have a map of social supermarkets on our website

With a massive 8.4 million people in the UK living with food insecurity, social supermarkets can save a typical family an average of £212 a month on food bills.

From the outside many social supermarkets look like everyday convenience stores, complete with shelves and tills. However, look a little deeper and you will see deals offering food that you can get in high street food shops for a fraction of the cost. Most have arrangements with the likes of Tesco and Asda to provide surplus food for 30% cheaper than normal prices.

We know that many of our customers struggle to put food on the table, and social supermarkets like the Green Tree House in Congleton and New Beginnings in Liverpool are examples of a growing number of enterprises known as social supermarkets. How they work may vary from place to place, but they are different from food banks in that members pay for their groceries, but prices are heavily discounted.

And for many it is not just about the food - they have a much broader role in supporting communities, from offering cooking classes to supporting residents with cost of living challenges. One example of this is the Community Shop in Runcorn, which provides a café for low cost meals, friendship groups to reduce isolation and walking groups.



We have a map of social supermarkets on our website

www.plusdane.co.uk

Find the 'supporting you' section and go to the 'coping with the rising cost of living' page, which has drop-down information boxes including food.

There is also:

- www.feedingliverpool.org
- Cheshire East Food Network Directory www.cvsce.org.uk
- Cheshire West's Live Well Directory www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

For other areas visit www.feedingbritain.org.





the latest from the customer assurance panel

The Customer Assurance Panel is made up of Plus Dane customers. CAP works with us and our Board to look at how we can improve our services for customers to make sure it is the best it can be. On this page, acting chair Angela Needham gives an update on what they have been working on:

Since the last edition of Unity the administration and support for the Customer Assurance Panel has transferred to Plus Dane's Governance Team. This brings the work of CAP closer to the Board and committees. CAP has representation on the Purpose Committee and provides reports to the Board.

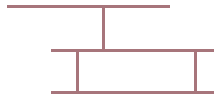
The three new Directors of Housing, Homes and Customer Experience attended our last meeting and gave an overview of their roles and priorities including the catch-up on repairs and the Tenant Satisfaction Measures which are required by the new Social Housing Regulation Act 2024.

There are still many areas where customers' perceptions of how Plus Dane performs are disappointingly low. It is one area we would like to delve deeper into in the near future with further surveys and analysis.

Our next meeting will consider what should be included in Plus Dane's Corporate Plan for the next three years. Our starting point is that customers should feel safe, secure and happy in their homes. If this isn't the case, we need to know why and seek to remedy it. The recent restructuring within Plus Dane is striving to put greater emphasis on improved customer communication and involvement. CAP will work with officers to move these aims forward.

CAP has been in existence for a year now and in that time we have contributed to Plus Dane's Customer Charter, made a formal consultation to the Government on the Social Housing Regulation Act 2024 and are currently having input into the Corporate Plan.





Housing Ombudsman Service

All local authorities and registered social housing providers, including us at Plus Dane, are required to be members of the Housing Ombudsman Scheme.

The Ombudsman works to **investigate complaints** and **resolve disputes** if you feel our process has not resolved your issue.

You can get in touch with them by:



completing the online complaint form on their website at www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk



by telephone on **0300 111 3000**



emailing info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk



or writing to **Housing Ombudsman Service, PO Box 152, Liverpool L33 7WQ.**



the complaints process



HAVE YOUR SAY!

- Customer Portal
- Online plusdane.co.uk
- Phone **0800 169 2988**
- Social Media
- Face to Face
- customer@plusdane.co.uk



in your home: **what to do...**

What is it?

Asbestos is a type of mineral that was once commonly used in building materials because it had some really useful properties, like being strong and resistant to heat. It was often added to things like insulation, tiles, and cement to make them stronger or better at keeping buildings warm or cool. Most asbestos products pose no risk to health, provided they remain in good condition and undisturbed. They are only dangerous when asbestos is disturbed, and the fibres are breathed in. Asbestos use was banned in 1999, so if your home was built after this it shouldn't contain any asbestos materials.

Is there asbestos in my home?

A lot of our homes were built before 1999, and so some may contain asbestos. This is quite normal and there's no need to panic. It is only a problem if the materials containing asbestos become damaged or are in a poor state of repair. We will tell you if we know there is asbestos in your home.

Keeping you safe

We follow all relevant legislation and guidelines regarding asbestos. Our specially trained staff actively locate and track asbestos in our homes and keep an updated register of this. Where necessary, communal areas are regularly checked to make sure asbestos remains undisturbed and customers are kept informed.

What should I do if I think there is asbestos in my home?

You must avoid working on, damaging or removing materials that contain asbestos. You should also avoid sanding down or scraping off textured coatings, or carrying out other alterations and improvements to your home without contacting us first.

Get in touch immediately if:

- Materials you think may contain asbestos have been damaged or disturbed - **don't deal with it yourself.**
- Protective coatings or sealants are peeling or breaking off, or **special warning labels have been removed.**
- Asbestos cement-based products like guttering and shed roofs **become damaged, badly weathered or eroded.**

Will you remove it?

We usually leave asbestos in place unless it becomes damaged or a repair, home improvement and alteration is taking place. This is in line with the current legislation and guidance from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). As long as the materials containing asbestos are in good condition, it isn't a risk to you.

I have asbestos in my home, can I decorate and do DIY?

Please contact us before doing any DIY work. If you are planning any improvements or alterations, you must complete the forms which can be found in the 'you and your home' section of our website under the 'rental customers' column.

- **Do not jet-wash or clean asbestos cement roofs or corrugate garage/shed roofs.**
- **Do not remove old floor tiles or linoleum which could contain asbestos.**

Visit www.gov.uk and search 'asbestos' for more information.



Fire doors - why we need them

Fire doors are crucial in preventing smoke and toxic gases spreading throughout a building. They allow people to get out and fire fighters to get to the fire. If you live in a communal building, it is vital that you:



- **Always keep your flat entrance door closed when not in use, and never wedge it open.**
- **Never wedge open communal fire doors.**
- **Never tamper with the door or self-closing device.**
- **Report any faults or damage to doors to us immediately.**
- **Do not replace or make any alterations to your flat entrance door without our consent.**

More fire safety advice on p11.



138 children received Christmas toys

our winter campaign

Our annual winter campaign reached more than 2800 people and provided more than £30,000 of support to our customers.

Running from December to February, the campaign identifies people in need of extra support with things like keeping their homes warm, emergency food parcels, mental health and wellbeing assistance and much more, including festive community events and tailored Christmas gifts for those who would otherwise go without.

Altogether the 2023/24 campaign supported 294 households across the Merseyside, Halton and Cheshire communities served by Plus Dane. 2807 customers benefited from support and 138 children received Christmas toys.

Energy vouchers worth £11,630 and food vouchers to the value of £11,775 were provided over the length of the campaign.

Our contracted partners generously donated grant contributions totalling £13,500 as well as raffle prizes to raise more funds.

Emma Sneyd, our Head of Engagement and Partnerships, said:

"Helping our customers every year with our winter campaign is a really important part of what we can do to offer support to people most in need. The cold weather and cost of living crisis – including Christmas essentials – mean customers struggle much more at this time of year.

We have had some great feedback this year that has shown the difference the winter campaign has made."

K* is a single mother of four children.

She works and claims Universal Credit to top up her earnings, but it just isn't enough.

She said:

"I have to have my radiators on all of the time to keep the house warm, I received some gas vouchers over Christmas and food vouchers it really helped to keep the heating on. I also received a bag of toys. It was so lovely thank you."

V* is a full-time carer for her two sons.

She said:

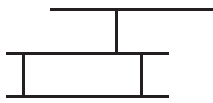
"I'm struggling going from weekly to monthly pay due to the changeover to Universal Credit. The toys helped a lot they were brilliant the boys were so made up, I also received vouchers and I was able to do a shop and top my gas and electric up so thank you."

This year we increased the amount in our emergency mitigation fund to £150,000. Much of this goes on our crisis fund for customers in need of urgent support.

You can contact us all year round for more information on help and support available, from access to food bank vouchers to help getting back into work and training. We can also refer customers to Pocket Power, a service that helps people switch providers and save money on household bills.

To find out more, please email customer@plusdane.co.uk or call 0800 169 2988.





in our communities



improving your home

Major retrofitting programme begins

Work has begun on a range of energy improvement works scheduled for 400 homes in the Liverpool 8 area.

Last year we secured more than £4m from the second wave of the **Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund** in partnership with Mayor Steve Rotheram and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. With co-funding from us, we now have an ambitious £8m retrofit energy improvement works programme underway.

The aim is to improve the energy performance rating of homes ranging between bands D-G, up to a C energy rating or better.

The eligible homes will be offered a detailed property survey from our contracting partner Next Energy.

The improvement works will vary in each home, but will include things like **loft insulation, solar panels, underfloor insulation, smart controls, cavity wall insulation, low energy lights, internal wall insulation, triple glazed windows, and external wall insulation.**

Our **Chief Executive, Ian Reed**, said:

"Funding from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund will really make a difference to what we can achieve when looking to improve the energy efficiency of our homes in L8. We are grateful to the Combined Authority for helping us to do more with our money and improve the homes of even more customers.

Making our homes more energy efficient is a key goal for us. With the cost of living crisis dragging on, these improvements will make sure more than 400 of our customers won't need to use as much energy to keep their homes warm and cosy. And, of course it has a big impact on our journey towards net zero."

We have also secured the top rating from the Government following completion of a specialist survey. We secured a Maturity Rating of 'Optimised', meaning Plus Dane is considered a retrofit leader.

We previously received £1m from the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund's first Wave, allocated through the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority to help 10,000 low-income homes save money on their energy bills.

Previous Plus Dane retrofit projects have included extensive cavity wall, external wall, and roof insulation, plus a pilot scheme installation of a ground source heat pump at a development in Wirral.

Fire door safety... *continued from P9*

Under new fire safety regulations, landlords in England now need to carry out regular checks on fire doors for all buildings of 11 metres or higher.

Fire doors at the entrance to individual flats need to be checked annually, while those in communal areas need checking every three months. If your home is affected by these new rules, when your check is due we will get in touch to arrange a time you will be home to let us in so we can inspect both sides of your front door. It is really important we are able to have access for this to help keep you and your neighbours safe.

Fire safety advice in our schemes

Riskhub's Residents' Hub is a self-serve portal that allows you to easily download the latest Fire Risk Assessment (FRA) and a summary of the Important Fire Safety Information for your block.

Visit <https://residents.riskhub.co.uk>, and in the 'Your property management company' field, enter **Plus Dane**.

You will need your unique property reference number, which will be at the top of a letter you will have recently received from us about fire safety. From there, you can follow the instructions to download the information you need.



We're your homebuilder

Our HomesHub team has been established across Cheshire and Merseyside for 15 years; our approach to delivering the very best possible service to customers looking for affordable home ownership is unrivalled across the region.

We believe that home ownership should be open to everyone, no matter your individual circumstances. We offer our homes through shared ownership, giving you the opportunity to spread the cost to suit your budget.

Visit the 'find a home' section of www.plusdane.co.uk for more information, call us on **0800 917 1066**, or email sales@homeshub.co.uk

  @homeshub



The latest phases of our developments in **Alexandra Gardens, Crewe;** **Kingsbourne in Nantwich;** and **Tabley Park in Knutsford.**

