



Annual
Report 09/10

Celebrating success

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Free
cash withdrawals

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HSBC 



Successful highlights

74.3%:

The percentage of tenants satisfied with the Unity's repairs and maintenance service. An increase of 14% on last year.

600:

The number of Unity properties that benefited from our 'affordable' warmth energy efficiency programme.

147:

The number of kitchen replacements completed during the year. We had planned to do 103!

40:

The number of staff helping us to achieve Investors In People.

33:

The number of new-build homes underway.

79.4%:

The percentage of tenants satisfied with the overall service provided by Unity. An increase of 13% on last year.

£859,000:

Invested in our properties.

21:

The number of environmental schemes completed.

40:

The number of tenants given training opportunities.

“It’s evident from the way that many people talk and behave [at Unity] that they are passionate about the work they do and the opportunity (almost responsibility) they have to ‘do right’ by their customers. The awareness and commitment to customers and customer service is excellent and has the potential to be exemplary.”

**Helen Burke,
Investors in People
Assessor.**

Chair & Chief Executive's statement



Karen Morley
Chair of the Board



Ali Akbor
Chief Executive

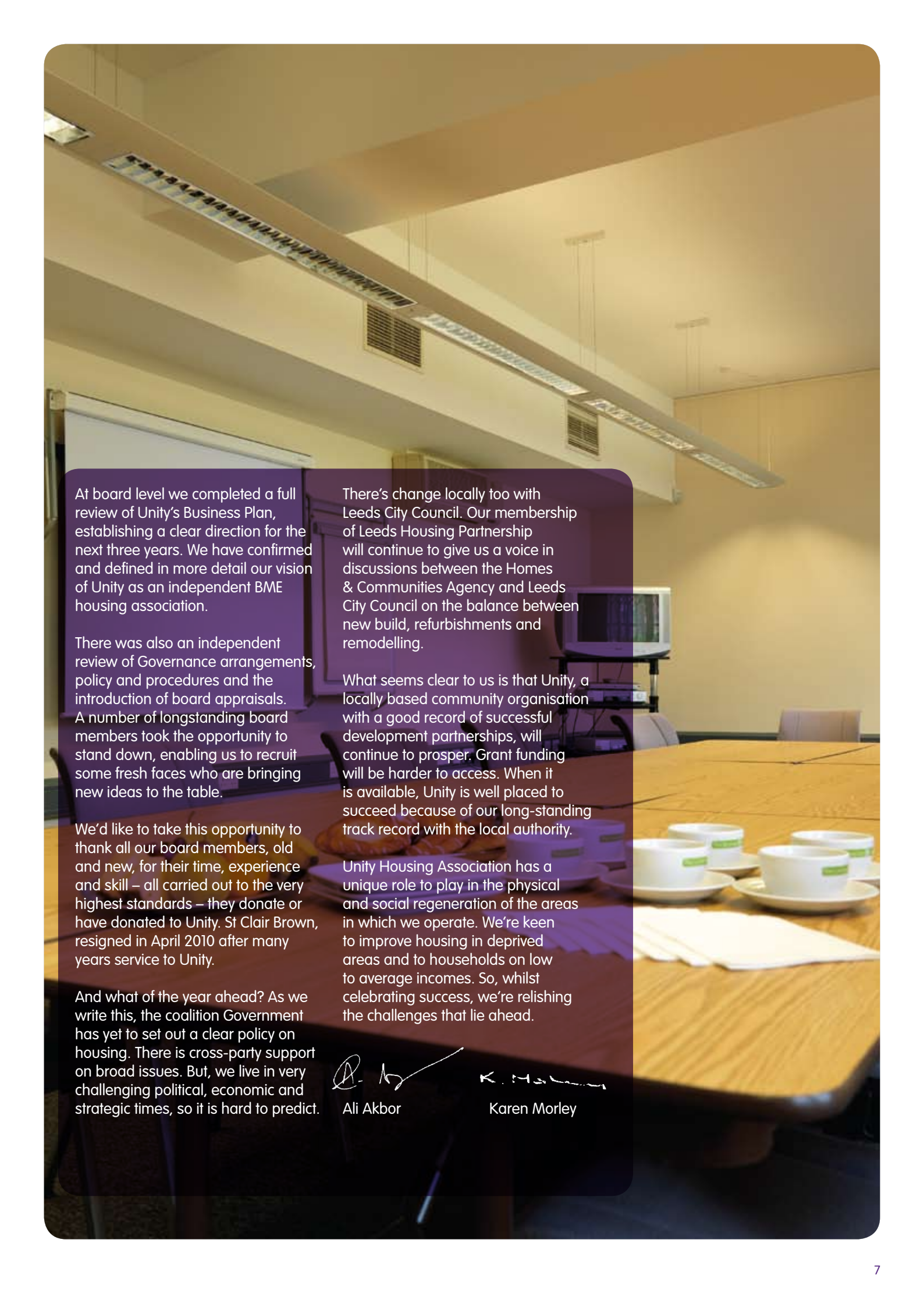
Let's celebrate!

Every now and again it's good to celebrate some success. And that's certainly the case at Unity Housing Association where we've enjoyed a successful year – both operationally and financially.

As you may already have seen on our highlights section, the hard work we've put in to improve our service is paying off. The status survey conducted in 2009 shows that 79% of our customers are satisfied with the overall service they receive from us. Equally pleasing is the news that nearly three quarters of tenants are equally happy with repairs and maintenance. Although we are not complacent and strive to increase our satisfaction levels.

Planned maintenance has had a particularly successful twelve months. We completed our 'affordable warmth programme' – just in time for the hardest winter in thirty years. Many tenants are also enjoying the benefits of their new kitchen, selected from Unity's 'kitchen brochure'. It's all part of a five year investment programme which means those who missed out this year will find their names coming to the top of the list soon.

Other reasons to be cheerful included the completion and official opening of our Hird Street development. Elsewhere Unity has 33 units of new housing which commenced on site. Despite a tough business environment, Unity Business Enterprise delivered a more than satisfactory performance. And, of course, we continued our successful regeneration, community and tenant involvement programmes.



At board level we completed a full review of Unity's Business Plan, establishing a clear direction for the next three years. We have confirmed and defined in more detail our vision of Unity as an independent BME housing association.

There was also an independent review of Governance arrangements, policy and procedures and the introduction of board appraisals. A number of longstanding board members took the opportunity to stand down, enabling us to recruit some fresh faces who are bringing new ideas to the table.

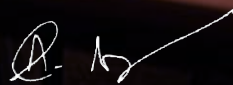
We'd like to take this opportunity to thank all our board members, old and new, for their time, experience and skill – all carried out to the very highest standards – they donate or have donated to Unity. St Clair Brown, resigned in April 2010 after many years service to Unity.

And what of the year ahead? As we write this, the coalition Government has yet to set out a clear policy on housing. There is cross-party support on broad issues. But, we live in very challenging political, economic and strategic times, so it is hard to predict.

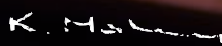
There's change locally too with Leeds City Council. Our membership of Leeds Housing Partnership will continue to give us a voice in discussions between the Homes & Communities Agency and Leeds City Council on the balance between new build, refurbishments and remodelling.

What seems clear to us is that Unity, a locally based community organisation with a good record of successful development partnerships, will continue to prosper. Grant funding will be harder to access. When it is available, Unity is well placed to succeed because of our long-standing track record with the local authority.

Unity Housing Association has a unique role to play in the physical and social regeneration of the areas in which we operate. We're keen to improve housing in deprived areas and to households on low to average incomes. So, whilst celebrating success, we're relishing the challenges that lie ahead.



Ali Akbor



Karen Morley

A photograph of a construction site for a residential building. The image shows the wooden roof trusses and rafters of a house under construction. Two construction workers wearing white hard hats and high-visibility yellow safety vests are working on the site. They are positioned on a metal scaffolding structure. The background shows other residential buildings with red-tiled roofs and green trees under a clear blue sky. A purple banner is overlaid on the top left corner, and a larger purple banner is overlaid on the bottom right corner containing text.

Group Objectives

A leading BME housing association, Unity was established in 1987. From its base in Chapeltown Leeds, it now manages 1,100 properties – a mix of houses, flats and bungalows. Our property portfolio meets the needs of a wide range of people, including families, singles, the older generation and those with special needs. We continue to focus our efforts on both BME and white British communities where there are high levels of deprivation.

The background image shows a residential neighborhood with a mix of brick and stone houses. In the foreground, there is a construction site with a white van, scaffolding, and stacks of bricks. The sky is blue with some light clouds.

Mission successful

Whilst our aim continues to be the provision of good quality homes at an affordable rent, ever spiraling property prices has made shared ownership an increasingly important element in our business mix. A developer of new affordable homes, Unity is a partner in Firebird JVC, a Homes and Communities Agency preferred development partner.

Early in our history we recognised that creating sustainable neighbourhoods requires more than the provision of affordable quality housing. So we added Unity Enterprise to our remit. This arm of our operation offers affordable workspace to local businesses through three business centres.

We invest in the community in other ways too; regeneration in the areas in which we work, and by actively encouraging tenant involvement in local activities. As a result, over the last three years we've successfully delivered on a number of housing and housing plus initiatives.

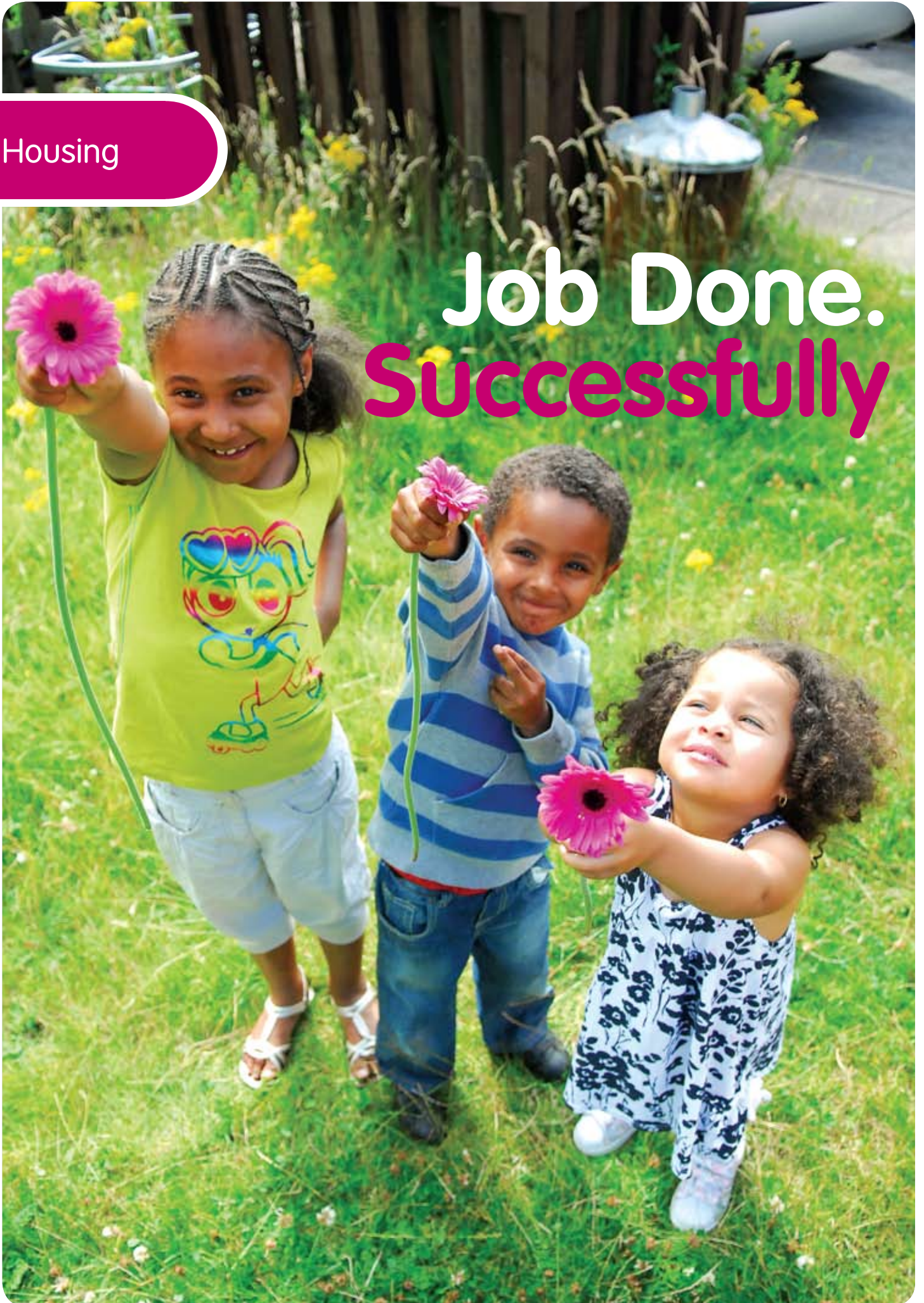
Our mission is to: deliver quality housing services, socio-economic development and related neighbourhood services to tenants and BME communities and neighbourhoods. We aim to provide choice, improved life opportunities and address inequalities.

Our objectives are to:

- Provide high quality and affordable housing services.
- Provide training, employment and business opportunities and services.
- Contribute to the regeneration of target neighbourhoods and continue to increase housing choice, linked to the aspirations of BME communities.
- Fulfill a unique role as a BME housing association in Leeds.
- Be a progressive and expanding business with a sound resource base.

Housing

Job Done. Successfully



The provision of high quality housing services is one of our key objectives. At the start of the year we set ourselves a number of targets to be completed by the year end.

These included:

- The completion of a planned maintenance programme.
- Delivering our affordable warmth programme.
- The review and appointment of a new grounds' maintenance contractor.

We're pleased to say that it's "job done". In fact, on planned maintenance we've actually done more than we'd planned. What's more we met another of our objectives: to involve tenants in the decision-making process.

Hot housing

Our tenants asked us to make their homes more energy efficient. And that's exactly what we did with our 'affordable warmth' project. Completed just in time for the coldest winter in thirty years this Government funded scheme saw 600 Unity properties made more energy efficient thanks to cavity wall and roof insulation. The properties not included in the project had either recently benefited from refurbishment or were new build. The Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating for housing associations in our peer group is set at 65. Following our affordable warmth programme, the average Unity property's SAP is 70.

Delivered

Every customer survey we receive from Unity customers tells us that repairs are the subject that they care most about. Most of our repairs are classified as routine, which means we must have them 'delivered' satisfactorily within 28 days of reporting. At the start of the year we set a 97% target completion rate. We actually achieved 98%.

Over the past year we've listened to feedback from our tenants and made changes to meet their requirements. We involved them in the selection of our new repairs' contractors. Both our in-house repairs' team and our contractors have become more customer aware. As well as being responsive we are also honest and open about what we can and can't do. As a result of these measures our overall repairs and maintenance customer satisfaction score has increased to 74.3%.

Changing rooms

Based on our stock condition survey, a new five-year planned maintenance programme is now well underway. Of course we consulted with our tenants and based the programme on their feedback. As a result, kitchens and bathrooms were first on the list. The investment in our property portfolio was £859,000. Thanks to tight cost control we actually completed 147 kitchens – 44 more than target. It was a similar story on bathrooms, where we completed 23 more than we'd scheduled.

Elsewhere, a change in strategy on painting and decorating contracts has enabled us to negotiate a lower overall cost for the next five years. The money saved was used to refurbish communal areas in flats and sheltered accommodation.

Everything in the garden is rosy

A group of tenants were closely involved in the decision to appoint Lex UK Ltd as our new grounds' maintenance team. Following a re-tender for the contract Lex are delivering a vastly improved service that's getting the thumbs-up from our tenants – at a lower cost.



Building success

“We’re targeting our energy on those neighbourhoods where our tenants live and where there is a high percentage of BME communities. Our development strategy supports this whilst neighbourhood management focuses on the economic, social and physical elements of regeneration including crime reduction, worklessness and the creation of more open spaces.”

**Wayne Noteman,
Acting Regeneration Director**

The building bricks of success...

As a leading BME housing association, Unity has a key role to play in the development of new homes in the target neighbourhoods in which we operate. For instance, we are taking a lead role in the review of Leeds Housing Strategy, a strategic group established to address inequalities in housing in the city.

Seen and ‘Hird’

One of our major objectives is the provision of high quality affordable housing, as well as the continued maintenance of our existing portfolio, our Business Plan contains annual objectives for the development of new homes. In this respect we are pleased to report another successful year. Our headline achievement was the completion of seven new units of family housing at Hird Street in Beeston. We were delighted to welcome local MP, and former Secretary of State for the Environment, Hilary Benn to complete the official opening of this important new development.

Ground breakingly green

We also started work on two new sites. At Highfield Gardens we are working in partnership with Accent Housing Association on 22 units funded by the Homes & Communities Agency (HCA).

At Windrush Court on Chapeltown Road we are developing 11 new flats in a ground breaking environmental project. When completed, they will be the first new housing association homes to reach Level 4 sustainability. Features include solar roof panels which convert sunlight into electricity. It's estimated that this could reduce energy consumption by up to 44%.

Other green features include a heat exchange system that sucks in pre-warmed fresh air from outside the building which is recycled. Some of the flats will recycle rainwater for toilet flushing, reducing water usage.

Employment opportunities

The Windrush Court project is also providing training opportunities for the unemployed. As a result of a partnership between Unity, contractors Lovell, the HCA and Leeds regeneration agency 'renew', two members of the building team; Lee Wilson and Steve Woodger are gaining valuable experience as they work for their NVQs; Lee in bricklaying and Steve in joinery.

Through Unity's 'Gateway Experience' scheme, Lovell is also giving local unemployed people the chance to gain construction experience through work placements. Supervised by qualified trade professionals the placements give people the opportunity to do sufficient work to gain a work reference and build a portfolio of site-based experience which will help their application for a place in further education.

More to come

Looking ahead, despite challenging times, Unity is well placed to continue its development programme and increase the choice of affordable homes in our target neighbourhoods – both for rent and shared ownership. Indeed next year will see a further acceleration of our development programme. Alongside the ongoing work in Chapeltown we are considering a further 50 new properties.



Success with tenant involvement

Unity Housing Association values the opinions of its tenants. So we've always encouraged their involvement in the development of our services. This past year we've focused on ways to open up decision making to our tenants.

The improvement inspectors have arrived!

In spring 2009 we conducted a mini-status survey. It asked tenants what improvements they wanted to see in their neighbourhoods. We received plenty of comments and feedback. Using this information, we developed an 'area improvement plan'.

We then offered tenants the opportunity to be involved in making the decisions on what this plan would deliver. Seven of our tenants took up the challenge; collectively they are Unity's Tenant Environmental Improvement Panel (TEIP). They inspected the areas which tenants had highlighted and gave each one a priority grading. Those with the highest priority grading were included in the 'area improvement plan'.

To meet the cost, Unity set aside a £200,000 environmental improvement budget covering the next two years. Work commenced on smaller projects, some of which cost as little as £500, in 2009. More major work, such as the Stonegates' fence replacement programme, is being completed in 2010.

The work of the TEIP continues. They continue to meet with Unity staff to check progress and, if budget permits, add new projects to the list.

Hot new kitchens

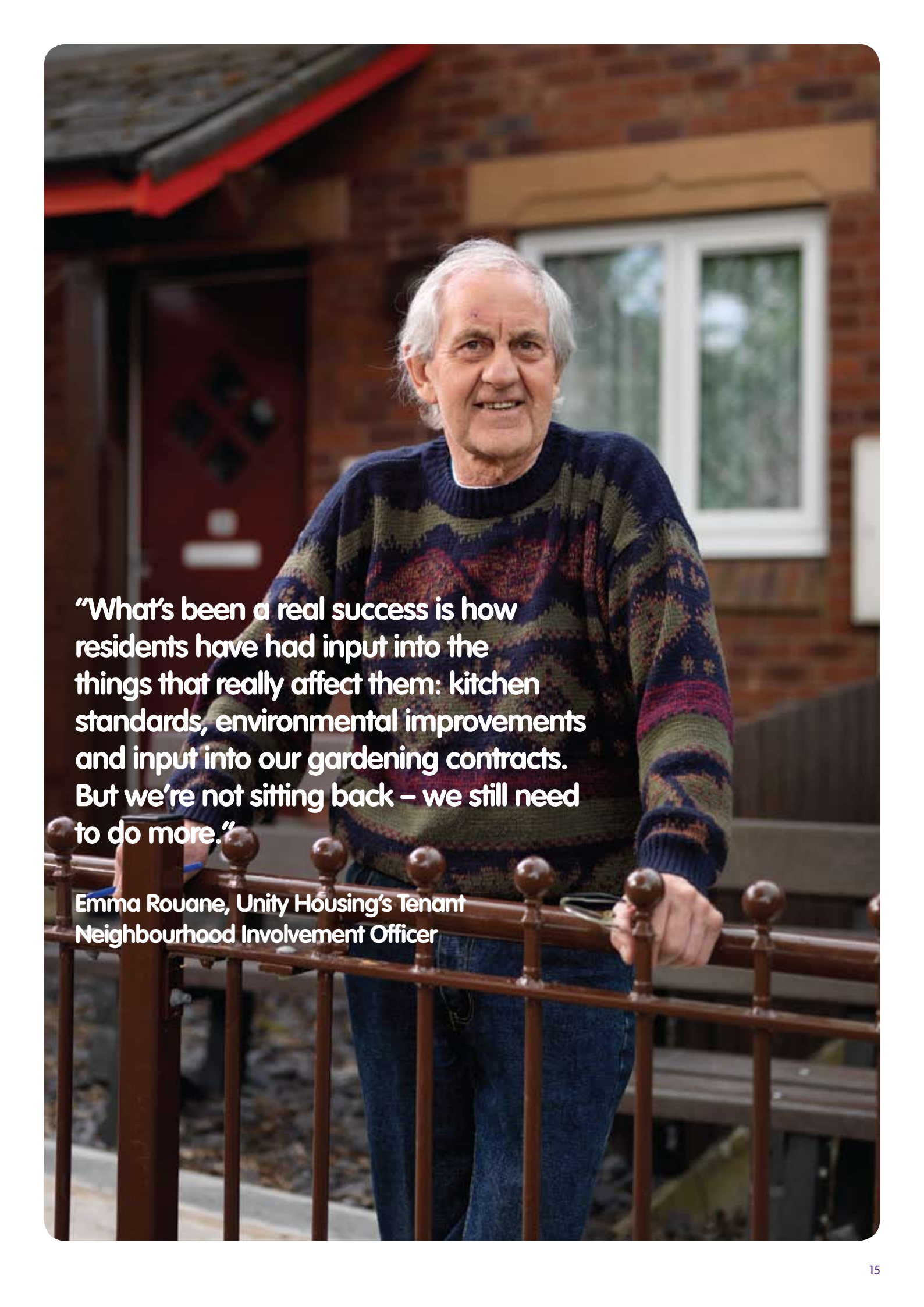
It's been a busy year for the Tenant Maintenance Panel. They helped to select new contractors for cleaning and gardening. They also helped us decide what type of replacement boilers we should use.

And last, but by no means least, they set the standards for our major kitchen refurbishment programme. This latter project was their main focus for the year. The Panel wanted to ensure the money was well-spent and that tenants were offered a good choice.

So, what started out as a simple review, resulted in the production of an eight page brochure displaying Unity's complete kitchen range. It includes everything from new units, fascias and worktops through to handles for cupboard doors.

Comments please

Our quarterly newsletters keep tenants up to date with all the latest developments at Unity. Every issue includes a comment card, providing tenants with an opportunity to make a suggestion or comment about any aspect of our service. One tenant was unhappy with the tone of our arrears' letters which she felt were too threatening and abrupt. We took a look at the letters – and agreed. We involved the tenant in the rewrites and she now agrees that the new ones hit a happy medium between firm and fair.

An elderly man with white hair, wearing a dark blue patterned sweater and blue jeans, stands on a balcony. He is leaning on a brown metal railing with decorative finials. The background shows a brick building with a window and a door.

“What’s been a real success is how residents have had input into the things that really affect them: kitchen standards, environmental improvements and input into our gardening contracts. But we’re not sitting back – we still need to do more.”

Emma Rouane, Unity Housing’s Tenant Neighbourhood Involvement Officer



The things that really matter to tenants are right on their doorstep. That's what the Tenant Services Authority says. We agree with them. That's why Unity is committed to the regeneration of target neighbourhoods. That encompasses the physical in terms of buildings, the socio-economic in terms of jobs and quality of life.

Whether it's through development, training and employment or the sponsorship of a local event, Unity believes success lies in much more than simply providing a first rate housing service. That's why Unity continues to invest in the communities in which it operates to increase housing choice, job opportunities and to create neighbourhoods where people want to live.

Stepping stones to a new job
Vibrant and sustainable communities rely on a sound local economy. A sound economy is built on jobs. But finding a job, or indeed developing the necessary skills, isn't always easy. Unity understands this. That's why we offer work placements to our tenants and work with external organisations to help tenants develop the skills they need to find work.

During the past year we have offered tenant and refugee work placements via HACT.

We are currently providing a home for community regeneration company, Trescom. It's running a scheme called 'stepping stones'. Funded by the Learning & Skills' Council, the scheme is open to tenants from Unity, Leeds

Success in the community

Federated and Connect housing associations. 'Stepping stones' targets groups who are currently off the 'employment map'. It offers them a route back into work by developing 'pre-employment' skills, giving them the confidence to take their first steps towards finding a job.

We also work with Nari Ekta, a skills' development project that works with Asian women who, because of their circumstances have few qualifications and little grasp of English. Nari Ekta offers a one year intensive course leading to 17 recognised qualifications. Work placements at Unity help develop confidence and practical office skills.

Let the children play

Some of our residents complain about "kids causing trouble". To be fair on the children, it's often due to boredom because there is a lack of play facilities in their area. So we established the Stonegates Play Project. It proved to be very successful with 15/20 young people attending regular sessions run by workers from Leeds Play Project. In conjunction with Leeds Federated Housing, the scheme has been

extended in Stonegates and, in partnership with Sanctuary Housing, an additional play project was established in Crossgates.

Cash into the community

There's another good reason for tenants to complete their feedback comment cards; every time one is returned to us, we donate £1 to our chosen local charity. During 2009/10 it was the Chapeltown Football Youth Development Centre. Unity was also the main sponsor for the Leeds Reggae Concert and Carnival.

We also made further progress with Union 105 with East Street Arts. This involved the refurbishment of the adjoining property to our office for use as space for art displays as well as being a centre for the arts and creative industries.

Successful enterprise

Unity Enterprise, the business arm of Unity Housing Association currently manages three business centres; Unity Business Centre (UBC), Chapeltown Enterprise Centre (CEC) and Leeds Media Centre (LMC) – the latter on a three year Service Level Agreement with Leeds City Council.

Together they provide affordable, managed work space for a wide variety of businesses, voluntary organisations and other social enterprises. In challenging economic times, demand for business units has held up well across all three Centres.

As well as successfully running these facilities, Unity Enterprise's role is tackling unemployment, improving training and creating opportunities for local people to establish new businesses and improve their life chances.

Unity Enterprise is now working with Chapeltown Development Trust (CDT), a recently established voluntary group championing the needs of the local community. Based in Unity's offices, their work links in with Unity Enterprise. As a result, during the year under review, proposals have been developed for investment in Unity Business Centre. Unity Enterprise is also hoping to access funding from the European Development Fund.

Measuring our success . . .

“We are continuing to provide services to our tenants providing value for money in every aspect of our operations.

This has enabled us to remain profitable in an extremely difficult environment providing us with a surplus to invest in our tenants repair programme and to continue to develop new homes for the benefit of the wider community.”

Steve Cagen, Finance Manager



... through service standards and financially

We have strong principles at Unity. As such we take real pride in the way we deliver our services and aim – day in, day out – to give our customers value for money. To ensure that we achieve this we agreed a set of minimum service standards and performance targets with our tenants. These are reviewed and the key results published quarterly in 'Unity News', our tenant newsletter.

Service standards cover the number of times our phones ring before they are picked up, how long we take to reply to a letter, respond to a message or answer an email. Key performance targets include repairs, complaints and new tenant surveys.

Rent

Similarly we set performance targets for rent collection and control of rent arrears. These are key target areas for landlords; collecting rent promptly benefits our tenants because it provides the capital for our planned maintenance and home improvement programme. Whilst we missed our performance targets, it was only by a small amount and this reflects an improving picture with the total amount of rent owed reducing year on year.

Voids

One area which was causing us particular concern twelve months ago was the number of empty one bedroom flats in our property portfolio. Whilst this was a market trend

affecting all landlords, due to the financial climate action still had to be taken. Re-let times, which had been averaging 9 days, suddenly shot up to 42 days. To overcome this problem we introduced a number of measures. We improved our product offer by bringing forward refurbishment of flats. We reviewed how we were marketing these properties and targeted specific sectors. Based on this knowledge we also introduced small incentives to increase tenancy take-up. These measures are proving successful with re-let times now down to 32 days. Our target is 21 days for 2010/11.

Our performance figures can be seen over the following two pages.

Performance summary

Performance Results

Current stock profile at 31/3/10

Bedspaces/Bedsits	9
1 Bed	225
2 Bed	304
3 Bed	327
4+ Bed	199
	1064

Lettings by ethnic origin for 2010

	%
Asian/Asian British	19
Black/Black British	38
Dual Ethnic Heritage	7
White British	22
White other	2

Average gross rents by property type at 31/3/10

	per week
Bedsits	£47
1 Bed	£63
2 Beds	£76
3 Beds	£84
4+ Beds	£89

Repairs performance

	09/10 %	target %
Emergency (completed in time)	99	99
Urgent (completed in time)	98	98
Routine (completed in time)	98	97
Routine repairs appointments kept	99	99
Satisfaction with repairs	86	85

Service Standards

	09/10 %	target %
Phone calls answered within six rings	85	83
Complaints dealt with within 10 days	100	96

Rent

	09/10 %	target %
Rent collected	99.75	98.43
Rent arrears	6.17	5.75



Overall financial performance

One of Unity's key objectives is to be a progressive and expanding business with a sound resource base. We are achieving this having just delivered another healthy surplus against a difficult economic backdrop. Along with strong ongoing demand for our properties, factors contributing to this financial success were tight cost control – in particular, savings on our planned maintenance budget – and re-negotiation of contracts. Low interest rates enabled us to cut the cost of borrowing and we made some savings in salaries.

Looking ahead, a fall in the rate of inflation means that our rental income will come down and that will lead to a lower surplus in 2010/11. However, the steps we've taken this year means that Unity will be able to take this in its financial stride.

Group Balance Sheet as at 31st March 2010

	2010 £'000	2009 £'000
Tangible fixed assets		
Housing properties	53,061	52,851
Social Housing Grant	(31,635)	(30,083)
Other grants	(3,152)	(3,065)
	18,274	19,703
Investment	5	5
Non-housing freehold properties	853	872
Other tangible fixed assets	75	80
	19,207	20,660
Current assets		
Debtors due within one year	361	361
Cash at bank and in hand	5,110	1,844
Long term debtors	10	10
	5,481	2,215
Creditors, amounts falling due within one year	(1,358)	(1,775)
Net current assets	4,123	440
Total assets less current liabilities	23,330	21,100
Creditors, amounts falling due after more than one year	14,982	13,421
Capital and reserves		
Designated reserves	305	150
Negative goodwill	230	235
Revenue reserves	7,813	7,294
Group funds	8,348	7,679
	23,330	21,100

Group Income and Expenditure Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2010

	2010 £'000	2009 £'000
Turnover	4,762	4,626
Administrative Costs	(1,154)	(1,184)
Direct property management costs	(2,418)	(2,366)
Operating Costs	(3,572)	(3,550)
Operating surplus	1,190	1,076
Surplus on the sale of fixed assets - housing		33
Interest receivable & other income	20	78
Interest payable & similar charges	(531)	(794)
Surplus for the financial year	679	393

A successful team

Our board and senior management team

The Board

Karen Morley

Chair

Shelia Saunders

Chair of Audit & Risk Management Committee

Michelle Anderson

Chair of Operations Committee

Peter Dickeson

Chair of Unity Enterprise Board

Tom English

Terence Holness

Shazia Khan

Robert Pitt

Andrea Tara Chand

Tim Yeardley

Audit & Risk Management Committee

Tom English

Shazia Khan

Shelia Saunders

Tim Yeardley

Operations Committee

Michelle Anderson

Terence Holness

Karen Morley

Robert Pitt

Unity Enterprise Board

Peter Dickeson

Ali Akbor

Gurdev Dahale

Chris Hill

Robert Pitt

Andrea Tara Chand

Remuneration Panel

Michelle Anderson

Peter Dickeson

Karen Morley

Shelia Saunders

Senior Management

Ali Akbor

Chief Executive

Parveen Sidhu

Operations Director & Deputy Chief Executive

Wayne Noteman

Acting Regeneration Director

Chief Executive

Operations Director & Deputy Chief Executive

Enterprise Manager

Housing Services Manager

Maintenance Manager

Neighbourhood & Tenant Involvement Officer

IT Officer

Acting Regeneration Director

Regeneration Manager

Firebird JVC

Finance Manager



We will deliver:
quality housing
services, socio-economic
development and
related neighbourhood
services

To:
our tenants, BME
communities and
neighbourhoods

Aimed at:
providing choice,
improved life opportunities
and addressing inequalities



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Affiliated to the NHF VAT Registration no. 734 5524 34



business for neighbourhoods



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IN PEOPLE



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