



30 Years of Unity.

Reflections from some of the key people who made it a success.



Homes & Enterprise

Supporting BME Communities
and Multi-Cultural Neighbourhoods



Providing choice, improving
life opportunities and
addressing inequalities



Providing choice, improving
life opportunities and
addressing inequalities





A celebration of 30 years

Shruti Bhargava Current Chair of Unity Homes & Enterprise

One of the most simple pieces of business advice is to work hard and celebrate success. And that's what we're doing at Unity in 2017 as we celebrate our thirtieth anniversary.

Taking Unity from an idea discussed by several like-minded people to an organisation looking after 1200 properties, three business centres and a whole host of added value services, has taken a lot of hard work. Over the past thirty years we've never lost sight of the original aim of the people who started this organisation – the delivery of quality and affordable social housing to the BME community in Leeds.

The success of Unity in so many ways is plain for all to see. We're delighted that the current Unity team continue to offer great service, value for money and have a vision for the future.

Of course we're doubly proud that Unity has retained its independence as a BME Housing Association. More than that, from humble beginnings, Unity has enhanced its reputation. As a result, we are now one of the leading developers of social housing in the Leeds region.

And it's not just about building new homes – which is of course – vitally important. Day-in, day out our housing management team deliver outstanding customer service with satisfaction ratings in the high 90s.

Those involved – be they the original members all the way through to the current staff, board and senior management team – deserve congratulations.

We hope that you enjoy this look back over the past thirty years of Unity. For some of us, it may stir some memories and, we hope, for all of us it will help us celebrate success.

Unity's original aims are always at the top of the agenda. As we move forward in what are uncertain times you can rest assured that our commitment to those aims won't be forgotten.





"It's much harder for people to find their own housing solutions. All of which makes Unity more relevant than ever."

The Birth of Unity

Clinton Cameron MBE Chair of Unity (1987 - 2003)

Clinton Cameron has been at the heart of housing in Chapeltown & Harehills since the 1980s. His involvement with housing began when he was co-ordinator at Harambee, a hostel for homeless young people.

Clinton was chairman at Leeds Federated Housing when Unity was established. He then served as Unity's chairman, retiring from office in 2003.

"In the mid-1980s Arvinda Gohil, Nina Rao and Georgina Webbe walked into my office in the Civic Hall and said: 'Harambee is going belly up. We must set up a Housing Association. Now.'

"I'd worked hard – with Mitch Lewis as my steadfast chairman - fought in hand-to-hand combat with the Housing Corporation bureaucracy to get Harambee registered as a Housing Association. I didn't want to set up something that might be seen as a rival organisation. But I could see that they were right. Harambee was doomed. So I said: "Fine. I like it.

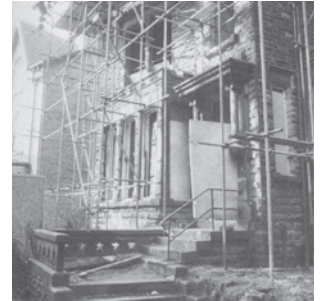
"We spoke to Jim Coulter, Director of Leeds Federated and Eric Bowen, the Council's housing strategist, and set about the task. There was strong support from the leading people working in the voluntary housing sector in



1987-1992

Two hundred up - and counting!

Following a meeting at Roscoe Church, Arvinda Gohil, Nina Roa and Georgina Webbe persuade Clinton Cameron that what Leeds needs right now is a BME housing association. With help and encouragement from Leeds City Council and Leeds Federated Housing Association, Unity is born to meet the housing needs of the Afro Caribbean population in Chapeltown & Harehills. Unity's first office was on Buslingthorpe Lane; its first employee, Angela Walwyn and its first properties on Sholebroke Avenue. Unity's maiden development of thirty brand new homes is completed in 1990. By 1992, under the leadership of Chair, Ruth Gardner, Unity's property portfolio has grown to 200 homes with ambitious plans to grow that number to over 500 in the next 2/3 years.



Leeds. Leeds Federated agreed to fund research to make the case for registration as a Black Housing Association. I remember going to ask for support from Keith Joseph, the MP for Chapeltown. He gave me a lecture on his past exploits as Housing Minister, in particular, setting up the Housing Corporation. But he could see no case for a Black Housing Association and wouldn't help us.

"Having built the case for the association, canvassed everybody who might be able to help, we were ready to set up the organisation formally. Just one little thing more – a name. The steering group met in Roscoe Church one evening with that the main item on the agenda. Choosing a name by committee is not a good idea; every member of the steering group had their favourite name in their head. We were going round and round in circles – carefully trying to avoid the risk of rejecting a member's suggestion and causing offence.

"Everyone in the steering group was completely unified on the objectives -- a Black Housing Association to serve the needs of all Black people in Leeds. Our definition of 'Black' was crystal clear; anyone from any community or ethnic origin who does not identify themselves as 'White'. Yes. Right on. But what are we going to call it?

In fact the name was staring us in the face: a unity of purpose, a unity of ideas, an organisation dedicated to the local community in Chapeltown & Harehills. What else could we call our new baby but: 'Unity!' We registered with the Housing Corporation, got a grant from the Housing Association Charitable Trust (HACT) and with the help and support of people in the voluntary housing sector we were up and running.

"The 1980s was not the best time to start a new housing association. Margaret Thatcher had just become Prime Minister and set a radical housing agenda. However, the following years proved to be the most successful period in the growth of Unity.

The actual first properties acquired by Unity are lost in the mist of time. "I think it was at Sholebroke Avenue, a young peoples' project which had been acquired for Harambee before the organisation was closed down," says Clinton. "We also developed a project in Headingley (Tagore House) named after the Bengali poet. Later we named Olrika House in Chapeltown after Olrika Clarke, a nurse, who was a past board member."

"Thirty years on it's a different world; there are more Black people in desperate housing need than in 1987. There is a new population from Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Eastern Europe. And it's not just new entrants to the UK. Young people born here are priced out of the housing market and can't afford market rents. It's much harder for people to find their own housing solutions. All of which makes Unity more relevant than ever.

"We need more selfless people like Arvinda, Georgina and Nina and the many others who have given years of voluntary effort to make life better for people they may never know. Brexit will bring even more challenges. We need a new younger cohort of selfless, committed people to use their skills, imagination and vision to make life better for our communities."



“A stack of documents and some friendly advice.”

Support & Encouragement

Eric Bowen Board Member (2003 - 2008)

Eric Bowen was a Unity board member from 2003-2008. However, almost 20 years earlier, in his role then as Assistant Director of Housing at Leeds City Council, Eric played a key role in the establishment of Unity.

“We’d seen that there was a need for a BME-led housing association in the Chapeltown and Harehills area. I remember advising Clinton when he came to see me that establishing a housing association from scratch would take a lot of hard work. So I gave him a stack of books and documents with information and advice on how to do it. He left undaunted and the rest, as they say, is history.”

There is however a lot more to Eric’s involvement with Unity in its early days. “In my capacity as Assistant Director of Housing I was able to support Unity by encouraging other local housing associations to offer Unity stock transfers. The Regional office of the Housing Corporation was very supportive throughout. Unity also benefited from being a member of Leeds Partnership Homes. Local associations developed new schemes for Unity outside their core area in Meanwood, Gipton and Crossgates.

Their success as a social landlord then led to them getting allocations for their own development programme. Unity grew to become one of the strongest BME organisations in Leeds and, of course, is one of a dwindling number of BME housing associations which still retains its independence.

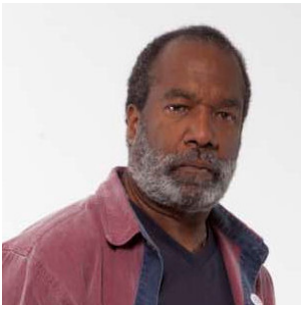
To survive, it’s had to become a professional and business-like organisation. However, it hasn’t forgotten the reason it started – which is to provide housing and support to the BME communities in Leeds.”

1993-1997

Passing the million milestone

With Clinton Cameron MBE now Chair, Unity adopts and agrees its first three year Business Plan. The following year (1994), it moves into a new home on Chapeltown Road where it has remained for almost a quarter of a century. The fully refurbished end-terrace building boasts a striking architectural frontage entitled ‘tangled roots’. In 1995 Unity’s turnover has reached the £1m milestone. A year later Ruth Gardner’s promise to build ‘500 homes’ is surpassed as Unity adds its 600th. The fast developing BME housing association gets itself more financial muscle, agreeing a £9m loan facility with its lenders – proof of its increasing maturity as a business. With that in mind, the Board and Senior Management introduce improved accountability standards and more rigorous governance procedures.





“There was clearly a need for a quality social housing provider.”

A quality BME provider

Cy Powell An original shareholder

Cy Powell says that he ‘fell into social housing after reading Chemistry at Newcastle Poly’. One of his claims to fame is that he was one of Unity’s original shareholders when it was incorporated as a ‘not for profit’ limited company. Cy went on to enjoy a successful time in the social housing sector working locally for North British and Headrow Housing before moving to associations in Kent and London, completing his career in Liverpool.

“I was chiefly involved during the period when BME housing associations were being formed all over the UK. As a member of the local BME community and working in housing I was more than happy to be involved as there was clearly a need for a quality housing provider in an area where, by and large, the BME community lived in poor housing stock.

My memories of those early days are somewhat hazy, but I do remember attending lots of quite intense meetings. As for the shares – I bought one – and that cost me a £1. I’ve still got the certificate! Of course, I’m delighted that Unity continues to prosper and remains independent when so many BMEs formed in that exciting period have either disappeared or been absorbed into bigger groups. My involvement with the development of Unity is a matter of great pride.

1998-2002

Let’s get down to business

Unity’s housing portfolio is now in excess of 800 homes. The organisation extends its services with the launch of its first community development strategy. Meanwhile its development programme continues apace as Unity completes its first ‘in house’ development project. Our reputation is clearly spreading well beyond Leeds as the then South African Government Minister for Housing, Sankie Mtlembi-Manhanyele pays us a visit. In 1999 Unity’s Tenants’ Forum meets for the first time. It’s also the year when a now familiar name makes its first appearance in our annual report – Ali Akbor – who takes over as Unity’s Chief Executive. As the world moves into a new millennium Unity moves into business, taking over the management of the Chapeltown Enterprise Centre and Chapeltown Business Centre. Unity celebrates 15 years as a BME housing association with the completion of its first shared ownership housing scheme.





"I don't think any of us realised we were making history."

A professional approach

Robert Pitt Board member (1987 - 2006)

When Robert Pitt retired from Unity's board he'd clocked up just short of 30 years as a board member. That's a record! Before Unity even had a board, he was a member of the steering group that took Unity from a great idea to a fully-fledged BME housing association.

"A number of issues at the time came together to kickstart Unity, one of which was research into improving housing for Black Elders in Chapeltown and Harehills. If I remember correctly the Women's Institute at Roscoe Church had some involvement at the very start. My mum was a member and suggested I go along to the one of the first meetings. Clinton Cameron was the driving force but a number of other people were pivotal, in particular Eric Bowen at Leeds City Council and the late Travis Johnson. Jim Coulter, then chief executive at Leeds Fed was a visionary and very supportive.

"The first Unity office was on Buslingthorpe Lane; we shared with PATH. Our first employee was Angela Walwyn who was tasked with getting the systems in place to operate as a social landlord. Our first properties came on a stock transfer, I think from the local authority.

"In those early days, the board/committee was very community based. As Unity has gone from strength to strength to become a multi-million pound turnover business with over a thousand properties, we have had to put more housing professionals on the board.

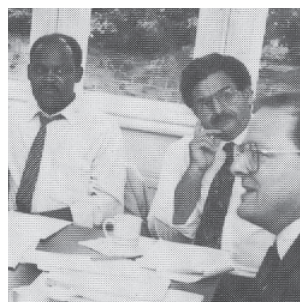
"Sub-standard housing has an impact on every aspect of life. More than just health, there's postcode discrimination which can prevent people from getting a job, accessing credit and much more. That's what encouraged me to get involved.

"Looking back I don't think that any of us realised we were making history. Over the past thirty years Unity has delivered a quality housing service, developed new quality housing stock and widened the expectations of where BME people can live in Leeds. It's also nurtured a lot of housing talent; giving young people confidence to go on and have a great career in housing."

2003-2007

Feeling good!

There's a change at the top of Unity as Clinton Cameron MBE retires as Chair and is replaced by Naheed Arshad-Mather MBE. Unity passes yet another housing milestone as our property portfolio now numbers over 1,000 homes. The success of our community involvement programme is marked when Unity collects the 2004 Asian Business 'Social Enterprise Award'. Our first Tenant Participation Officer is appointed who quickly gets tenants involved in the design and content of Unity's new website. Unity agrees to be the accounting body for the 'Feel Good Factor', a local initiative aimed at improving levels of fitness and the general health and wellbeing of people living in Chapeltown & Harehills.





“Unity is a financially sound, forward looking BME housing association.”

Maintaining independence

Naheed Arshad-Mather MBE Chair of Unity (2003 - 2009)

Naheed was Chair of Unity's Board from 2003-2009. At present, she is a portfolio holder for Strategic Housing, Regeneration and Enforcement at Kirklees MDC. Naheed was awarded an MBE for her services to Housing and the Community.

“As one of the founding members, I feel a bit like Unity's mum! In the early years through my work with Leeds City Council's Equal Opportunities unit, I mentored and paid close attention to its development. It is truly excellent to see Unity now celebrating 30 years as a BME social housing provider. As Chair I led Unity through some challenging times and that makes it even more gratifying to see how successful it's become.

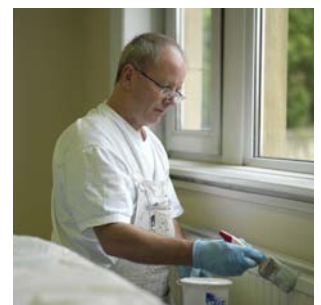
I think you can put that down to a number of factors. Firstly Unity has never lost sight of its focus as a BME housing association serving the needs of Leeds people. There was certainly a need for that 30 years ago in a housing sector that had largely overlooked the needs of BME communities. Secondly we always wanted to maintain Unity's strong identity so we avoided partnerships and group structures, retaining our independence.

And finally, last but by no means least, is the leadership of Unity's Chief Executive Ali Akbor. Ali's prudent, patient and realistic approach to every aspect of Unity's business has enabled it to flourish in a beneficially controlled way. And that's where Unity is today – a financially sound, forward looking, BME housing association with its size, quality of service and overall integrity firmly in place.”

2008-2012

25 years and we've got stars in our eyes

The Audit Commission clearly like what they see when they inspect Unity, handing out stars for our Housing Management service and for our potential to be even better. Continuing our work in the local community, in 2009 Unity launches its 'Tenants to Work' scheme. The following year, the quality of our staff and systems earns us Investors in People accreditation. That same year, 600 Unity tenants benefit from our Affordable Warmth energy efficiency programme. Elsewhere, Unity's business arm expands with the addition of the Leeds Media Centre to the Unity Enterprise portfolio. Talking of Unity Enterprise, we announce a major one and a half million pound refurb at Chapeltown Enterprise and Unity Business Centres. To further our work in Beeston & Holbeck, Unity embarks on a collaboration with the team behind the area's local regeneration plan.





"I'm proud to have played a part in the Unity story for over a decade."

Ready for the 21st century

Karen Morley Chair of Unity (2009 - 2014)

Karen Morley, an accountant by profession, joined Unity's Board in 2003 and accepted an invitation to take over as Chair in 2009, a position she held until 2014. Karen's focus was very much on Governance – in particular increasing the professionalism and skills of the Board to more fully reflect the needs of an ambitious and expanding 21st century BME housing association.

"During my time as Chair we introduced a formal interview process for new Board members, started annual appraisals for Board members and, to reflect the time input required to be a valuable Board member, an element of remuneration. We also turned our attention to the core elements of Unity – our housing management services and development.

On housing management we introduced a series of more demanding targets. We then recruited the right management team to deliver on those targets. It was a similar story on development which, over the past few years, has gone from strength to strength. It's fair to say that the improvements in housing management we've achieved and our increasing reputation as a housing association that delivers on development are key elements in the success story that is Unity.

And, of course, as Chair I was very keen that Unity maintained its identity and independence as a BME housing association. I'm proud to have played a part in Unity's story for over a decade. I'm sure that the organisation has much more to offer and, in a few years' time, will have an even greater story to tell."

2013-2017
Nicola's a knock out at our AGM

In 2014, Unity's property portfolio stands at 1200 homes. The popularity of our housing offer is confirmed when a unit in our Scott Hall Road development attracts over 1,000 bids! Unity completes its first ever development outside Leeds – Trinity Court in Huddersfield. We welcome Olympic Gold Medal winner, Nicola Adams to our 2015 AGM. In 2015 Unity submits a bid to the Homes & Communities Agency to build 120 homes for affordable rent, Unity's biggest ever house building programme. We complete the refurbishment of our Business Centres one of which, the UBC, is home to Unity Employment Services (UES). During 2016, UES's training and mentoring service enabled over 250 local people either find work or improve their skills and therefore their employability.





Providing choice, improving
life opportunities and
addressing inequalities



Unity Homes & Enterprise

30 Years of Unity.

Our mission

Provide housing choice, improve life opportunities and address inequalities.

Our objectives

- Provide and continue to develop good quality mixed tenure housing which reflects needs and aspirations.
- Provide high quality affordable housing services.
- Involve and work with our tenants and the communities we serve to inform and improve services.
- Work with our partners to encourage the regeneration of our target neighbourhoods.
- Provide and facilitate business support services and encourage local enterprise.
- Be a progressive and expanding business with a sound resource base.

Our values

Integrity – being honest, transparent and sincere with strong principles

Respect – in the way we treat people, service users and each other

Flexible – in how we work for the benefit of our tenants, other people, the organisation and each other

Commitment – to provide services to meet the needs of our tenants, local people and local neighbourhoods.

Business focused – continually review and adopt best practice and ensure we operate efficiently and effectively in order to make the best use of resources

Equality and fairness – in the way we work and deliver our services



Unity Housing and Enterprise

Unity Housing Association Ltd
113-117 Chapeltown Road, Leeds LS7 3HY
T. 0113 2007700

A charitable housing association registered with the Homes & Communities Agency LH3737. Registered under the Co-operative and Community Benefits Society Act 2014 25616R. Affiliated to the NHF. VAT registration no. 734 5524 34

