

unity

plusdane.co.uk

customer magazine

Plus Dane Housing

Issue 49 | Winter 2024



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our
annual
report -
see the
highlights

Dealing
with anti
social
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what
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campaign -
supporting
you

Unity is our magazine for all Plus Dane customers

our magazine for all Plus Dane customers. Inside you will find a wide range of information about our services, our communities and how we can support you and keep you safe in your home.

Get in touch at communications@plusdane.co.uk

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Do you have contents insurance?

Contents insurance is designed to help protect your things. No matter how careful you are, there's always a risk your belongings could be broken, stolen, or damaged. This could happen by accident or as the result of an unexpected situation like a flood.

The **My Home Contents Insurance Scheme** is **designed for social housing customers**. Provided by **Thistle Tenant Risks** and **Great Lakes Insurance UK Limited**, it can offer you insurance for the contents of your home including things like furniture, carpets, curtains, clothes, electrical items, jewellery, pictures and ornaments.

For more information, call Thistle Tenant Risks on 0345 450 7288 or visit www.thistlemyhome.co.uk



A message from the chair of our Board

Welcome to our latest edition of Unity Magazine.

This will be the penultimate column I write as Chair as I will be stepping down in March 2025 following nine years in the role which is the maximum time a board member can serve under our rules.

Max Steinberg will be taking over from me. He joined the Board in October so that we can have a handover period to ensure a smooth transition.

Max has an impressive record of serving people in the North West, having held a number of senior roles in housing and regeneration spanning over 25 years.

As part of this recruitment exercise, we have also welcomed a number of new Board and Independent Committee Members.

Angela Needham has joined the Board having been the Chair of our Customer Assurance Panel. Angela is a Plus Dane customer from Cheshire and has done a great job in getting the Panel up and running and has no trouble in speaking her mind.

Amanda Graham, who is also a member of our Customer Assurance Panel, and David Foxcroft have been appointed independent members of our Purpose Committee. Amanda has been a shared owner customer with Plus Dane since 2019 and David has experience of being a Board member and a background in areas such as retail, local government and Housing. Gary O'Shiel has joined our Audit & Assurance Committee also as an independent member. Gary has over 20 years experience in the social housing sector with experience in finance, asset management and compliance.

It is essential that boards evolve and develop their thinking by introducing members with new skills and experiences and I am really pleased that we have been able to secure the appointment of two customers that not only bring relevant skills but also lived experience as Plus Dane customers which will provide additional opportunities for the Board to make sure the customer voice and is strongly reflected in the decisions we make.

Sir Peter Fahy, Chair,
Plus Dane Housing





Pension Credit and winter fuel payment

Pension Credit gives you extra money to help with your living costs, if you're over State Pension age and on a low income.

It has been in the news as there are so many people who are entitled to it but don't claim. If you are entitled but don't get it now is the time to claim, as you will also get the winter fuel payment and benefits like your TV licence.

Our Welfare team can help you check if you are eligible. You can apply for Pension Credit at any time, but you must do it before December 21 to get this year's Winter Fuel Payment along with it.

Organisations like **Citizens Advice and Age UK** can also help, as well as the Pension Credit claim line on **0800 99 1234**.

Managed migration

We are currently in the transition period from benefits to Universal Credit, called Managed Migration. The government will send you a UC migration notice letter when it is time for you to move – or you can apply to move over sooner if you would be better off. In this case, **be sure to get advice before you switch**, as you can't go back once you have moved across. There is **lots of help available to support you with a Universal Credit application.** You can **ask for advice from our Income or Welfare teams, or from Citizens Advice** before you apply.

If you need help with finding out if there are any benefits you may be entitled to, get in touch with our Welfare Team. Call 0800 1692988 and ask to speak to the Welfare team or email: FinancialIndependence.Team@plusdane.co.uk



We have a benefit calculator on our website and a budgeting tool that can help you with your finances. Visit the 'supporting you' section of our website at www.plusdane.co.uk and find the 'money matters' page for the links.

West Cheshire Credit Union



West Cheshire Credit Union is a Chester-based co-operative that provides safe and affordable financial services, like savings accounts and loans, to all members of the local community, particularly to those who are unable to access mainstream products.

The union has recently been opened up to those that live, work, study or volunteer in Crewe, Sandbach or Congleton area too.

Visit www.wvcu.co.uk or call **01244 399006** for more information.



Friendly debt advice

StepChange is a dedicated debt advice charity that can help if you are worried about money. Visit their website at stepchange.org, or call them on **0800 138 1111** for free **help and support for as long as you need it** or ask our Welfare Team to make a referral to the **RAISE Debt Advice Team**.








reporting anti social behaviour

When you report anti social behaviour to us, there are different things we can do to try to solve the problem. In most cases, warning letters and acceptable behaviour contracts help resolve issues.

Sometimes though, **in the most serious cases, we need to take legal action** - including taking steps to get our property back.

If we don't follow the correct legal process we could face harsh penalties, like fines for an unlawful eviction. **This can take a long time from start to finish.** We recently dealt with an extreme case of noise nuisance, where one resident of a block of flats caused severe disruption to others. We worked with our customers to gather the evidence needed to support a legal case that was eventually successful.

The table below shows the sort of timescales involved.

 Report	 Action we took	 Timescales
A new customer moves into a building mainly occupied by older people. We start getting complaints about late night visitors causing a disturbance and playing loud music.	We visit the customer to talk about this and give advice about managing their tenancy. They are sent a tenancy warning letter.	The home visit is within 5 working days of the first complaint. <div style="text-align: right;">5 days</div>
More complaints from neighbours	We visit the customer again and give more warnings. We tell neighbours how they can gather evidence for an anti-social behaviour case, and offer support.	Evidence gathering takes around three months. We also investigate any underlying issues that may be causing someone to behave anti-socially. <div style="text-align: right;">12 weeks</div>
Complaints of visitors and noise through the night, and damage to communal areas.	We see CCTV evidence of the customer and their visitors causing anti-social behaviour. This is a breach of their tenancy, and means we can start the legal process to take the property back.	We visit within one working day. A Section 21 notice then gives customer two month's notice to end their tenancy. They have the right to appeal. <div style="text-align: right;">8 weeks</div>
The customer did not leave after the two month notice	We applied to the courts for what is called an accelerated possession hearing.	This hearing has a waiting time of between 6 - 10 weeks. <div style="text-align: right;">6-10 weeks</div>
The court grants us possession of the property within 28 days.	We tell the customer.	This takes a further 4 weeks. <div style="text-align: right;">8 weeks</div>
The customer still does not move out.	We apply to the Court Bailiff for a warrant of eviction, and tell the customer.	There is a waiting time of around 6 weeks for a warrant of eviction date. <div style="text-align: right;">6 weeks</div>
We get an eviction date from the court. The customer moves out, but leaves things behind.	The Bailiff takes possession of the property, which is returned to us.	On average, the date of eviction will be four weeks after it is issued by the court. <div style="text-align: right;">4 weeks</div>
A legal notice is served, and a date made for the customer to collect what was left.	The customer takes their things, and we prepare the property for relet.	The legal notice is between 7 and 14 days. <div style="text-align: right;">7-14 weeks</div>



our annual report 2023 | 24 is out now!

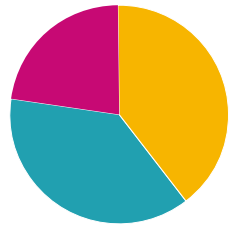
The period covered in our 2023 | 24 annual report reflects a year of some change in Plus Dane, and I am confident we now have a joined-up plan of action for what we want our services to look like which has been driven by the views and needs of customers. You have a commitment from me and the team that we will continue to work over the next 12 months to improve the experience to make it easier for you when dealing with us.



Ian Reed
Chief Executive

where does each £1 of income go?

- Operational costs 22p
- Our homes 40p
- Building new homes 38p



invest in your home

£17.7M
invested in our homes

99.4% LAST YEAR 96%
were satisfied with planned investment works
[our target was 98%]

536 LAST YEAR 422
new kitchens

347 LAST YEAR 268
new bathrooms

helping customers into homes

Built **159** LAST YEAR 148
brand new homes

277
new homes on site



our repairs service



we completed **47,525** repairs in total 

we spent **£20.1M** on repairs in total

we received **803** complaints

we received **120** compliments

your feedback



here when you need us

we responded to **2100** customers requesting support 

we supported **706** customers through our hardship fund 



supporting communities

our winter campaign helped over **2,807** customers to manage another tough winter & provided toys for **138** children



anti social behaviour

we managed **329** separate ASB cases  **LAST YEAR 310**

helping you into work

we supported **102** customers into work & training **LAST YEAR 75** 

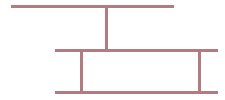


customer voice

2,027 customers responded to our customer consultations **Plus Dane voices**



complaints



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



We understand that sometimes, despite our best efforts, we might get things wrong and you might want to submit a complaint.

If you have a problem, let us know as soon as possible so we can take steps to put things right, learn and make improvements. Our complaints procedure allows us to do this while dealing with problems quickly and fairly, and this is how it works:

HAVE YOUR SAY!

online



www.plusdane.co.uk

portal



live chat



email



customer
@plusdane.co.uk

whatsapp



0151 351 4747

face to face



phone



0800 169 2988

keeping you safe



let us in and help keep your home safe

As your landlord, we are required to carry out regular safety checks, including:

- **Annual Gas Safety Check:**
A yearly check that should take less than an hour, to make sure gas appliances and fittings in your home are safe and functioning properly.
- **Electrical Safety Inspection:**
A full electrical safety inspection will be conducted every five years, usually taking about 2-3 hours, to check that wiring, circuits, and appliances are up to current safety standards.
- **Fire door inspections** (if you live in certain types of communal buildings)

It is really important we can get into your home to do this and keep your home safe. When it is time for any of these inspections, we will make an appointment at a time to suit you so we can get the access we need.

Occasionally, we may also need access for other important reasons, like carrying out repairs or other safety inspections. Allowing us in to do these regular checks helps us spot and address potential issues early, making a safer environment for you.

For your safety, please don't attempt any repairs involving gas or electricity yourself. If you notice any issues, call us right away on: 0800 169 2988 so we can help.



Electrical safety over the winter months

Festive decorations and electronic gifts mean it's important to take extra care in your home at this time of year. Here are some tips.

Check Lights and Decorations: Make sure your lights and decorations meet **British Standards (BS)**, which are safety guidelines to ensure that electrical products are safe to use. Always turn them off and unplug them when you go to bed.

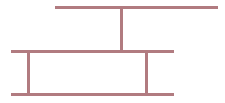
Use an RCD for Outdoor Equipment: Protect yourself by using a **Residual Current Device (RCD)** with any outdoor electrical items. This safety device cuts off power instantly if there's a fault, helping to prevent serious accidents.

Candle Safety: Never place candles near your tree, furniture, or curtains, and never leave them burning unattended.

Avoid Overloading Sockets: overloaded sockets and plugs could overheat and cause potential hazards.

Fires caused by e-bikes, e-scooters and hoverboards are on the rise and can be devastating. Take extra care storing and charging them in your home, making sure they are not in the way of your exit. **Do not leave them on charge when you go out or are asleep, never cover the battery pack when charging,** or store near things that could easily catch fire.

IF THERE IS A FIRE, DON'T TRY TO PUT IT OUT – GET OUT AND CALL 999



a word from our customer assurance panel

It has been a busy couple of months for us...

Due to one CAP member being selected to become a member of the Plus Dane Board, and another joining one of the independent committees, we now have some vacancies on our panel. We will shortly be working with Plus Dane on a recruitment plan, so we get back to full strength. If you are interested in expressing an interest in these vacancies, please get in touch by emailing irene.crone@plusdane.co.uk or ring her on 07929 208 270 for a chat about the role.

Back to business – Some CAP members joined members of Plus Dane to begin to plan a refreshed engagement framework to look at how we listen to customers in the future and use their feedback to improve services. We discussed what works well and what needs to change – it's early days but we will keep you posted on progress in the next edition of Unity.

At our last meeting in October we discussed concerns around arrears and how Plus Dane is managing these in a sensitive and timely manner. We acknowledge that repairs are still an ongoing concern, but Plus Dane is working on catching up

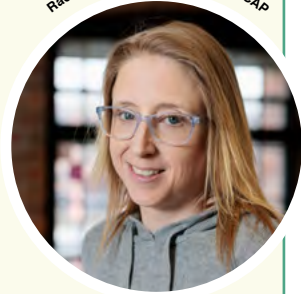
which has resulted in a reduction in delays which is a positive outcome.

Your voice is incredibly important and a key part of how Plus Dane operates, and completing the feedback surveys after any contact with Plus Dane is vital to improve performance, and within the CAP meetings we are able to look at the results from these each quarter.

Plus Dane's annual winter campaign is now underway, so we would like to encourage you to get in touch if you are struggling and need some support. Please don't suffer in silence, reach out and access the help you need.

Finally, we would like to thank our outgoing Chair, Angela Needham for her strong leadership and wish her well in her new role on Plus Dane's Board.

Rachel Johnston, Interim Chair, CAP





our winter campaign

Our annual winter campaign is targeted towards households facing challenges during the festive season and the colder, darker months. Last year, we helped 2,807 customers with things like food and energy vouchers, winter warmth packs, toys and support and events in our supported living and older person's schemes.

We work to identify households who might need this help over the winter and take referrals from Plus Dane colleagues and partners. Get in touch with our **Engagement and Partnerships team on 0800 169 2988 or email engagement&partnerships@plusdane.co.uk** if you haven't heard from us and think we could help.

Take a look at the 'supporting you' section of our website on **www.plusdane.co.uk** for advice on cost of living, school holidays support, winter warmth and more.

Save money with Lightning Reach

We have teamed up with financial support portal Lightning Reach - and it could help you save money.

Lightning Reach is an online service which makes it easy for people to find and apply for a wide range of personalised support in one place, like benefits, help with bills and more. This includes costs like food or utility bills, disability adaptations, replacement furniture or white goods. **Successful applicants have saved an average of more than £1000!**

Follow the referral link for customers on our website **www.plusdane.co.uk**, alongside other cost of living support and advice. Find the Money Matters section or type 'Lightning Reach' in the search bar to find the link.

Then answer a simple 10-15 minute questionnaire to quickly see what support you are eligible for and apply for it direct from the portal.



Jobs plus launch

We are delighted to be part of a pilot project offering community-led employment support in Liverpool 8. **Plus Dane has received funding from DWP** and is **one of ten pilot sites in the UK** taking part to target areas of high unemployment.

We are working with **Transform Lives, Liverpool in Work** and **mental health CIC First Person Project on Jobs Plus**, a community and person-centred approach to supporting people into better employment opportunities. **Jobs Plus is available to anyone** in the L8 area. **You can drop in, call (07470 792 605) or email (admin@transform-lives.org)** to arrange a confidential, friendly chat'.



Alsager day of action

A community clean up day in Alsager helped residents get rid of hundreds of unwanted items.

The Radway Estate event was organised by partner organisations including Plus Dane, Alsager Community Support, Cheshire East Council, Alsager Town Council, Cheshire Fire & Rescue, Cheshire Police, Change Grow Live, and the Alsager Clean Team. It was aimed at **promoting engagement, wellbeing and reporting of anti social behaviour and environmental issues.**

Three skips were provided for residents to use, more than 270 items were disposed of, and **our Environmental Team helped to collect a further 43 items** from customers homes!



Find your dream home through shared ownership



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



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

