



plusdane.co.uk

unity

customer magazine

Plus Dane Housing

Issue 50 | Spring 2025

inside:



Preventing
fires in
your home
What to do

Community
safety
Reporting
gangs

Making the
switch to
**Universal
Credit**

Unity is our magazine for all Plus Dane customers

Welcome to the spring edition of Unity, our customer magazine. 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

inside this edition

4 **Money matters**

- Moving over to Universal Credit

5 **Fire safety**

- Common causes and how to keep safe

6 **Service charges**

- What they are and what they cover

10 **Gangs and organised crime**

- How to report anti-social behaviour



A note about our social media channels...



We have made a decision to close our account on X (formerly Twitter).

We have been monitoring our engagement over the past nine months and have very few customer enquiries through the platform, so we are confident this **will not significantly impact customers.**

X as a platform is increasingly toxic, and not a place we think there is any value being anymore.

If you need to contact us using social media, you can do this through our Facebook and Instagram accounts. We also have a Whatsapp number that you can use to connect directly to our customer team on 0151 351 4747.





A message from the chair of our Board

Welcome to our latest edition of Unity Magazine.

I was a police officer for 34 years including time as Chief Constable of Cheshire and Greater Manchester, so when I was asked nine years ago to be Chair of Plus Dane Housing, I had to give it a lot of thought.

As a police officer, I had learnt that housing and the work of local housing officers is so important to the wellbeing of local neighbourhoods and the people who live in them. During my time as Chair, this has been ever more evident to me as the Board and committed colleagues at Plus Dane have worked to provide more homes, improve the ones we already have and to play our part in the lives of local communities.

We have simplified the organisation so that we are more focussed on the issues most important to customers such as improving the repairs service, helping tenants to reduce energy costs and installing thousands of new bathrooms and kitchens. As I step down there is much for Plus Dane to be proud of, but also much more still to do.

If anything the housing crisis in this country has got worse, and in particular so many families are in temporary accommodation and so many individuals sleep on the street. A safe, warm home is fundamental to almost every other aspect of life and wellbeing; building more homes has to be an absolute national priority, and I know that Plus Dane, working with local people, is very much ready to play its part.

Sir Peter Fahy, Chair,
Plus Dane Housing



Communal cleaning comes in-house

The **contract** for our **communal cleaning service** with our current provider is **coming to an end** and in order to have greater control in how the service is delivered, we have decided to **bring the service in-house** so that Plus Dane colleagues rather than a contractor are delivering the service. **From 1 April we will start this process** and will **share more on it and our progress in the summer edition of Unity.**





Moving on to UC **Universal Credit**

If you receive benefits but are not yet on Universal Credit, keep your eye out for a letter that will tell you what you need to do and when you need to do it.

The government is still in the process of moving everyone on 'legacy benefits' (like jobseekers allowance and employment and support allowance) over to Universal Credit, but this doesn't happen automatically.

You will be sent a Universal Credit migration notice letter when it is your time to move, or you can apply to do it sooner if you would be better off (be aware you can't switch back once you have moved across). When you get the letter you will have three months to take action, or your old benefits will be stopped.

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 the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) before you apply.

More people apply for Pension Credit

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 can also help with things like housing costs, the winter fuel allowance and a free TV licence.

We were pleased to see an increase in people applying for pension credit last year, as there are still lots of people who don't realise it is something they might be able to claim.

The DWP says there was a 145% increase in applications last year, after the winter fuel payment that had previously been paid out to all pensioners was cut.

You can see if you are eligible and apply online at www.gov.uk/pension-credit or by phone by calling the Pension Credit claim line on 0800 99 1234. Our fantastic welfare team is also on hand to help.

Find out what you could claim

Did you know our website has a benefit calculator that will help you find out what benefits you can claim? Our partnership with independent provider entitled to means that the calculator is free to use, and the details you provide are anonymous. Just make sure before you start you have information about your savings, income, pensions and existing benefits. Search www.plusdane.co.uk or find it in the 'supporting you' section under 'your money matters'.

StepChange debt advice

StepChange is a dedicated debt advice charity that can help if you are worried about money. Visit their website at www.stepchange.org, or call them on 0800 138 1111 for free help and support for as long as you need it.

StepChange
Debt Charity





in your home stay aware, stay safe

A fire in your home can be devastating, but many fires are preventable with simple precautions. Over the last year there were 25 fires in customers' homes, caused by everyday activities that can be easily managed to keep you and your family safe.

The top causes of fires - and how to prevent them

Unattended Cooking

- Never leave your hob or oven unattended while cooking.
- Keep flammable items like tea towels, paper, and cooking oils away from open flames or hot surfaces.
- Use a timer or alarm as a reminder if you need to step away.

Faulty Electrical Equipment

- Regularly check cables and plugs for damage.
- Don't overload sockets – use surge protectors where possible.
- Unplug appliances when not in use, especially high-power items like kettles and heaters.

Items Stored Near Heating Appliances

- Keep furniture, clothing, and other flammable materials at a safe distance from heaters.
- Never cover or block ventilation on electrical appliances.

Smoking/Vaping

- Always use a proper ashtray, and never smoke in bed.
- Ensure cigarettes are fully extinguished before disposal.
- Never charge vapes overnight or on flammable surfaces.

Your safety is our top priority. Here are some simple and affordable steps you can take to protect your home and give you peace of mind.

1. Lock up every time

- Always lock your doors and windows, and double-check them at bedtime to make sure everything is secure.

2. Be cautious with keys

- Avoid leaving spare keys in obvious places like under mats, plant pots, or above doorframes. Ask a trusted neighbour, friend, or family member to keep it for you.
- Never label your keys with your address, or leave them near doors or windows where they could be grabbed.

3. Light up your home

- Use plug-in timers for lamps to make your home look occupied when you're out. These can be inexpensive and are easy to set up.
- Keep outdoor areas well-lit by using battery-operated or solar-powered lights.

4. Keep valuables out of sight

- Avoid placing phones, laptops, or handbags near windows where they can be seen from outside.

Candles

- Keep candles on stable, heat-resistant surfaces, away from anything flammable.
- Never leave a candle unattended – always blow them out before leaving the room.
- Consider using LED flameless candles for added safety.

Possible Arson & Bin Store Fires

- Keep communal areas clear of rubbish to reduce fire risk.
- Report any suspicious activity.

Fire Alarm Activation

- Ensure your smoke alarm is working – test it once a month.
- Never remove batteries or cover the alarm.

Stay Fire-Safe

- Most home fires can be prevented by staying alert and following these simple steps. Take a moment to check your home today – a few small changes can make a big difference
- Keeping your home safe and secure

We're here to help If you have concerns about your home's security or need advice, please don't hesitate to contact us. Together, we can work to ensure your home remains a safe and secure place to live.



5. Be mindful of visitors

- Always check who's at the door before opening it. Use a door chain or spyhole if your door has one. If you don't recognise a visitor, ask for identification before letting them in. If in doubt, don't open the door and contact us or the relevant organisation to confirm their identity.

6. Maintain your home's security features

- Report any issues with locks, doors, windows, or communal areas to us as soon as possible.
- If your home has a shared entrance, make sure the door is closed securely behind you and don't let strangers follow you in.

7. Be alert to unusual activity

- Keep an eye out for suspicious behaviour in your neighbourhood and report it to the local police or your housing team. Your vigilance can help keep the community safe.

8. Stay informed

- Join any local safety initiatives or community groups in your area. They're a great way to share tips and stay updated on safety news.
- Follow us on social media or check our website for additional resources and updates.



Your service charge 2025/26

The cost-of-living crisis continues to have a grip on the UK and we know this is impacting family finances. We understand this, and our teams have been working really hard to make savings and reduce costs wherever we can to ease that financial pressure. For the second year running we have reduced service charges for the majority of our homes.

22 out of 28 service charge groups will see a reduced price in 2025/26

For 2025/26 we have managed to **reduce the service charges for 22 of our 28 schemes/blocks**. This means that the vast majority of Plus Dane customers will again see lower service charge costs this coming financial year.

For 3 schemes there will be an increase of £3 per week or less, and we are still working hard to reduce the increase for the remaining 3 schemes.

What's included



Communal area maintenance

For those customers who live in areas with open or shared green spaces that includes grass, shrubs, bushes and trees, we provide a maintenance service to keep these areas tidy, we also litter pick parking and flagged areas, this is all included in your service charge. The cost is shared between eligible nearby homes or on the estate and is dependent on the amount and type of shared or open space. Costs are outlined in your annual service charge bill.

Service schedule

- 12 grass cuts between mid-March and mid-September (weather dependent)
- 2 hedge trims* prior to Spring and during Autumn
- 2 visits to turn over and weed the beds
- 1 inspection of trees** and 1 cut back of bushes in communal areas
- 4 litter picks during winter [we will also collect any litter during grass cut visits]
- 1 visit to reduce any woodland over-growth
- 4 visits to collect fallen leaves during Autumn and Winter
- 2 weed sprays

What we need from you

- Please remove any obstacles from the grassed area such as toys, garden furniture.
- If you have a pet please remove any animal faeces on the grass. We really can't cut grass if we see any animal faeces present as it poses a significant health and safety risk for our colleagues.

**we don't cut hedges back in Spring as this is nesting season for birds*

***we don't cut back trees and will only remove them if they are dead, diseased, or dangerous.*



SCAN HERE
FOR MORE
DETAILS



Communal cleaning

We are responsible for the maintenance and cleaning of communal areas, including:

- All external communal entrance areas
- Passenger lifts
- Internal/external communal foyer areas
- Internal/external communal stairs / Stair landing areas
- Internal/external hallways / Corridors / Common Areas
- Refuse rooms or Internal bin stores
- Internal/external doors/glass panels

Deep annual clean

A deep clean is required to all properties on an annual basis

External bin stores - twice per year

External bin stores are to be brushed and jet washed on a 6 month basis

High level cleaning - twice per year

- The light fittings are dusted and any cobwebs removed and wiped clean with a damp cloth to make sure all dirt is removed
- The ceiling / wall areas are to be dusted and wiped clean with a damp cloth to make sure all dirt / cobwebs are removed



Your Council can help with...

Bin and refuse collection

For information on when your bin collection day is, to report a missed collection, to request a bin or for general advice on bins, recycling and waste, please visit your local council's website.

Street lights

Maintaining or repairing street lighting may either be the responsibility of your council or Plus Dane, depending on the location. Please contact us for more information.

Pest control

If you have a problem with pests in your home, please contact your local council who will be able to help. If the issue is within a communal area of your building, you can contact us and we will come out to assess and resolve the problem.

online



www.plusdane.co.uk

portal



My Account

live chat



email



customer
@plusdane.co.uk

whatsapp



0151 351 4747

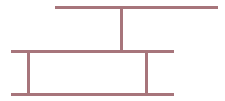
face to face



phone



0800 169 2988



a word from our customer assurance panel

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

I've certainly found my feet as Chair! I have been fortunate enough to meet the Plus Dane Board and be part of those discussions. I was able to discuss the role of the CAP at the corporate induction to new starters, and we wish them best of luck in their new roles.

Rachael Johnston, Chair, CAP



One of our CAP members is now part of the Purpose Committee as an Independent Member which is great for customers to be further involved with discussions and decisions.

We acknowledge that there is still a wait for repairs, however, the catch-up programme is progressing well, and will positively impact this. We are keeping a close eye on the performance scores of all areas and will continue to do this in meetings.

Plus Dane is keen to get customer's voices and we have seen a questionnaire planned for sending to customers. Another great way to be part of positive change is becoming part of CAP and we are excited to welcome new members after our recruitment drive.

If you would like any further information on CAP please see the Plus Dane website.

Rachael Johnston
Chair, CAP

Can you help?



We are looking for a small group of customers to work with us over the year to improve the way we communicate with customers and help us to transform our repairs service. We will meet online a few times within the year and we will be offering a voucher incentive in recognition of your time.

If this sounds like something you would be interested in please call our engagement team on 07929208270 or 07436815010.





supporting you



our winter campaign



Our annual winter campaign again helped hundreds of customers and people in our communities over the festive season and colder months, bringing our colleagues, contractors and other partner organisations together to help those in need.

The **campaign identifies customers 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 2024/25 campaign has helped support 441 households across Merseyside, Halton and Cheshire**, and is expected to have benefited thousands of individual customers.

To help combat loneliness and isolation in our communities, **we were able to provide funding for 24 community partner organisations and groups**, plus events in our own temporary accommodation schemes and 14 of our older person's schemes.



boosting digital skills

We have partnered with an organisation called We Are Group to help us deliver digital skills training to Plus Dane customers and colleagues. This is part of our digital strategy, focused on breaking down barriers to accessing digital services.

This will include **in-person group and one-to-one sessions** covering the basics of digital skills, such as **managing emails, accessing online services like banking and shopping, using Plus Dane's digital services like our customer portal, social media, and staying safe online.**

It will even bring some of **Plus Dane's old computer equipment back into use, to be refurbished and provided to customers.**

We will have more details about this soon.

Energy vouchers worth £19,374 and food vouchers to the value of £21,534 were provided over December and January, and **12 of Plus Dane's contracted partners generously donated** made donations totalling **£9950**

VOUCHERS worth over £40,000



NSPCC



Plus Dane is also a partner of the Clegton NSPCC toy appeal, which this year distributed 350 toys to 82 families across the town.

Our head of social impact Emma Sneyd said:

"As a social landlord, we are committed to tackling social inequality by enabling individuals and communities to thrive. Our 'digital by design' approach aims to make sure both customers and colleagues have the right skills, knowledge, and support to connect."

Our monthly drop-in event in Runcorn for customers of Plus Dane and Onward Homes is up and running again for 2025. The event takes place **on the last Thursday of every month** and offers **free help and advice on everything** from accessing benefits and cost of living support to repairs.

The next monthly drop-in is taking place on Thursday, March 27 from 10am until 2pm at Castlefields Community Centre, Village Square, Castlefields, Runcorn WA7 2ST.



crime gangs and how we deal with them

When you think of organised crime gangs it might sound like something from a film, but in reality one could be operating near you.

In law, an organised crime gang, or serious organised crime gang, describes a group of as little as three people working together to carry out criminal activity. This could be things like drug dealing, using weapons and violence, cyber crime, child exploitation and human trafficking.

Our community safety team works in partnership with local police teams to share what we know about criminal gangs in our communities.

We deal with incidents where police have carried out search warrants on our homes and found large amounts of things like cash, drugs and weapons. In some cases, customers become involved, having been groomed or cuckooed – which means gang members have taken advantage of them and are using their home for illegal activity.

Young people in particular can be targeted and exploited into moving around drugs, money and weapons. This is what is known as 'county lines'. Once a young person is dependent on a gang, they are pressured into criminal activities, often with threats of violence and blackmail towards them and their families.

Involvement in criminal activity breaks your tenancy agreement with us and means you could lose your home. An example of this is a recent case where we had reports of suspected drug-related activity in a female customer's home. We shared this information with the police, and when the customer was stopped and searched she was found with a large quantity of cash and firearms. This not only led to a lengthy prison sentence, but we were able to take possession of the home.



CrimeStoppers.

We are committed to keeping our communities safe and free from criminal and anti-social behaviour. You can contact us or the police any time if you have information or concerns about this kind of activity near you. Search 'reporting ASB' on our website or call Crimestoppers anonymously on

0800 555 111



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**



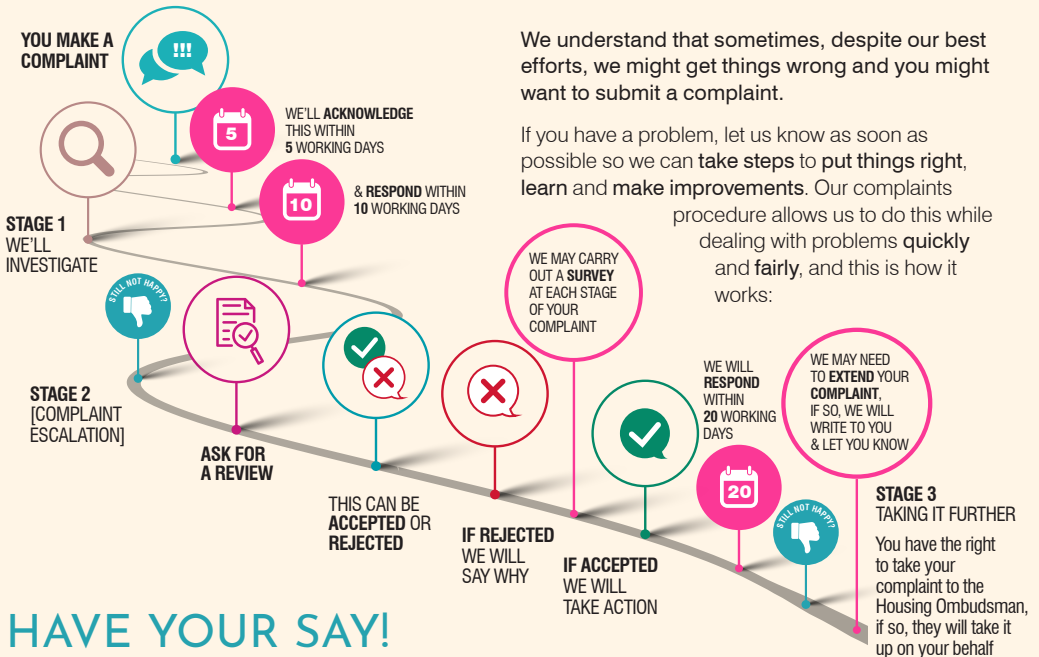
emailing info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk



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**
 My Account
- live chat**
- email**
 customer@plusdane.co.uk
- whatsapp**
 0151 351 4747
- face to face**
- phone**
 0800 169 2988

Find your dream home through shared ownership

Our HomesHub team has been established across Cheshire and Merseyside for 20 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.

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



Sunfield in Wilmslow, Cheshire is a range of stunning two bedroom homes starting from **£85,000 for a 25% share.***

Our three bedroom homes in Tabley Park, Knutsford, Cheshire start at **£160,000 for a 50% share. See our website for full details of these developments and many more.**

*Eligibility as set out within the Capital Funding Guide for Shared Ownership.

