

plusdane.co.uk

unity

customer magazine

Plus Dane Housing

Issue 40 | Winter 2021

virtual assistant

"hi, how can I help?"



services in one place



check out our **new website** now for all these new features and more www.plusdane.co.uk

lots of advice



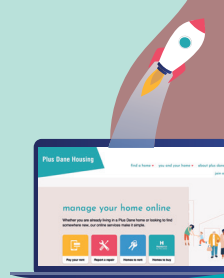
advance search



support for you



take a look now



inside:



supporting you through the winter

highlights from our annual report

welcome to the winter edition of our new look **unity** magazine

This gives Unity the same fresh design that you'll see on our website, social media, repairs vans and letters from now on. We hope you like it – let us know what you think!

Inside you will still find all the information and advice you need to help you through winter and into the new year. We know there are a lot of things going on at the moment, from the ongoing pandemic to rising gas bills, that could be causing a lot of stress and worry. Remember, you don't have to struggle alone and there are many ways you can contact us for help - see the back page for ways to get in touch.

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We continue to follow the latest government advice to keep you safe.

Don't forget, check out our website www.plusdane.co.uk for the latest updates and any changes to our services.

Our offices are still closed to customers who don't have an appointment.

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unity customer magazine

changing for the better



Our new executive team is ready for the challenges facing us in housing - as we prepare to play our part in tackling the problem of climate change and reducing our carbon emissions.

Welcome to this edition of Unity. There has been a lot going on since last time - firstly, we have made a number of new appointments to our Board and to our governance committees to strengthen the oversight of Plus Dane, and our plans to build more homes and improve our existing homes. You can read more about this on our website.

We have also appointed two new members of our Executive team. As part of our drive to be more efficient, the Executive team has reduced from five members to three, and there have been changes to responsibilities within the team. Paul Knight has been appointed as Chief Operating Officer and will oversee everything including housing management, repairs, customer service, planned investment, health and safety and compliance. Claire Ryan has been appointed as Deputy Chief Executive and will oversee Finance, IT, Performance, Governance & Assurance and Development. Both Paul and Claire have considerable senior experience in the housing sector, and a real passion for delivering for customers.

In October, our Board finally got the chance to properly meet face-to-face and to look at two of the key challenges for us as an organisation. Along with other housing associations, we are seeing unprecedented demand on our repairs service, made more difficult by increases in cost and shortages in materials. This is impacting on the service we are providing so we have to make sure we have tight control of cost, that we are keeping tenants informed and are focussing on the most serious issues.

The most pressing future challenge we face, like the rest of the planet in reality, is net zero carbon - 40% of carbon emissions come from homes. There is a huge challenge ahead to put together investment programmes and to decide on the best new technologies to reduce the impact of heating our homes on our carbon footprint. We have submitted a bid for government funding for a pilot project to decarbonise some of our existing homes, and we will use the learning from this to inform future decisions. Of course all this is in the teeth of the current increases in energy bills for our tenants, and so we must not lose sight of more simple improvements which make homes more energy efficient.

We know 2021 has been another challenging year for us all, and as we head into the festive season and new year, on behalf of Plus Dane I would like to wish you and your loved ones a very merry Christmas and health and happiness into 2022.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Peter Fahy".

Sir Peter Fahy, Chair,
Plus Dane Housing

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





supporting you

There have been big changes to our lives since the start of the pandemic, and we know some could be having a serious impact on your income and how you budget.

This includes the **end of the £20 Universal Credit uplift** and rising energy prices.

If you find yourself struggling or worrying about money, **we can help with any difficulties** you may have, or put you in touch with our specialist partner organisations.

Our welfare team are experts in benefits help and advice. We can do income maximisation calculations to check that you are receiving everything that you are entitled to, support you with claims that you may need to make, and more.

For debt advice, we can refer you to our external partner RAISE, who offer an independent, fully regulated, and free service to our customers.

We can look at helping you budget and find the best deal for your utility bills, as well as help you apply for any grants offered by utility companies, charities or local authorities.



benefits calculator online

We have a benefits calculator on our website that will show if you are eligible to make a claim. Visit www.plusdane.co.uk and find it on the money matters page in the 'supporting you' section.



pension delay

The Department of Work and Pensions have admitted that the pandemic and staffing issues have caused backlogs in the state pension payments of those reaching the age of 66. If this affects you, you may qualify for an advance payment.

Apply at www.gov.uk/short-term-benefit-advice

For more information or help applying for any of the issues on this page, contact the welfare team on 0800 169 2988 or email welfare.team@plusdane.co.uk.

help to keep warm

The Warm Home Discount gives you £140 off your electricity bill or a voucher for your prepayment meter if you get the guarantee credit part of Pension Credit or on a low income.



If you were born on or before September 26, 1955, you should be eligible for a one-off Winter Fuel Payment; and there are other one-off payments available to people on benefits to pay for extra heating in prolonged cold weather. **Search www.gov.uk for more details.**



Ian Reed
Chief Executive
Plus Dane Housing

Our 2020/2021 annual report is out now!

Our annual report shows our performance over the last financial year and showcases how we have strived to achieve for our customers. The full report is available on our website at www.plusdane.co.uk, and here are some of the highlights:

turnover

Income for the year from rents, services, sales etc

target	actual	previous
20 21	2020 21	year
£74.4M	£76.1M	£74M



we spent

£3.86 M

on **repairs** in total



97.5%

were **satisfied**
with their **new**
build home

LAST YEAR
89.1%



we completed

36,522

repairs in total



'I couldn't have asked
for better workmen'

there when you needed us

we responded
to over

145,400

customer contacts



we completed

14,404

emergency repairs



we helped our
customers

achieve over

£1.7 M in

financial gains



we supported

1,200

customers to
access **universal
credit** for the
first time



we processed

1,542

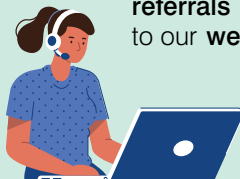
referrals
to our **welfare team**



we were able
to support

76.3%

of **new
tenancies**
to **succeed**





annual report

86.9%

were **satisfied** with our **repairs service**

[our target was 91%]

LAST YEAR
89.6%

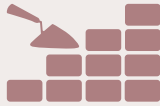
0.92%

of **repairs** resulted in a **complaint**



98.6%

were **satisfied** with our **planned investment works**



on average it took us

19.2 days

to **complete a repair** from the time it was **reported** to us

LAST YEAR
15 days



keeping you safe

we completed

311

Fire Risk Assessments



we serviced

214

fire alarms



we serviced

67

fire extinguishers



we completed

100%

of **gas safety checks**



supporting our communities

our **winter campaign** helped



over **3,725** customers to manage the **toughest christmas** in memory

our holiday **hunger projects** supported

313 children from **220 families**



we **delivered food parcels** to

436 homes



we managed

154

separate **ASB cases**



we helped to safeguard

56 individuals & families who had been suffering **domestic violence** or serious **ASB**

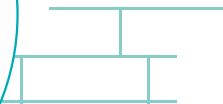




winter fire safety

Winter can be a risky time for fires as we make more effort to keep warm. Here's some things to keep in mind:

- Keep electric heaters away from curtains and furniture, and never use them for drying clothes. Always unplug them when not in use.
- Never use hot water bottles in the same bed as an electric blanket, even if the blanket is switched off. Unplug electric blankets before you get into bed, unless they have a thermostat control for safe all-night use, and always follow the manufacturer's instructions.
- Be careful using candles or matches - put them out completely before leaving the room or going to bed.
- Make sure candles are secured in a proper holder and away from materials that may catch fire, like curtains.



condensation

Condensation in your home can cause damp and mould, which can become a big problem. Here are some ways to help keep it to a minimum:

- Keep your heating on low all day in cold weather – around 18 degrees - if you can. It is cheaper to heat a room with on-peak electricity than by using bottled gas heaters.
- Ventilate kitchens and bathrooms when you are using them.
- Cover boiling pans and turn kettles off after use
- Avoid drying clothes on radiators or heaters

Open your curtains for a few hours each day to allow moisture to get through any window vents.

look after your Christmas lights!

After 12 months packed away in the loft, Christmas lights can easily become electrically unsafe. When getting them out, check they are not damaged or broken before use and look out for loose wires. Use only replacement bulbs of the same type and rating as those originally supplied with the lights, and always switch them off and unplug them before you go to bed or go out.



ring doorbells



If you have a Ring doorbell or any other video doorbell installed, it's important to know you are responsible for what they record and the footage you keep.

The camera should be set up to only film the grounds of your home, like your driveway or outside your front door – and not into anyone else's homes or gardens, or communal areas like car parks – or you could be accused of invading your neighbours' privacy, and even end up in court or fined. Under data protection laws, people have a right to know if they are being filmed by a video doorbell.





supporting springboard

Unemployed people in Cheshire and Warrington have the chance to bounce back into work and quickly get into a fulfilling long-term career through a new programme.



Springboard Cheshire provides free one to one personalised support from an expert employment advisor to unemployed people so they can quickly start their new career. The advisors will work with participants to build their confidence and skills and get applying for jobs, as well as providing practical support and training on things like developing a CV, interview technique and digital skills.

The programme aims to support adults who have recently become unemployed or at risk of losing their employment as a result of the pandemic. Support is also available to young people aged 16 - 24 who are not in education, employment or training.

While **Springboard** aims to get people into employment as quickly as possible, it's about finding a role that is right for them so they can stay in their new career.

If you are looking for a job or training in social care, there are roles across Merseyside and Cheshire available now! Get in touch with us to find out more.

For more on these and other work and training opportunities, email us at **engagement&partnerships@plusedane.co.uk**.





We have completely overhauled our website to improve your experience of our online services.

We've worked with a group of 20 customers throughout the project to really understand what information needed to be on the site and, just as importantly, where you'd expect to find it.

The customer panel joined in three Zoom sessions with web designers Nexer and Plus Dane colleagues, resulting in some great feedback and recommendations.

The panel also had an opportunity to log into the new site before it went live and give their feedback. Overall, they said when completing tasks on the new site compared to the old there was a **good improvement**.

We've got some **great new features** on the site aimed at making your life easier too. These include Gabby, our new virtual assistant, which you can put your questions to in the first instance if ever you need more help or information.

We hope that Gabby will be able to reduce the amount of times you might need to call us to speak to a member of our team.

We've also **improved the search tool** on the site to help you find the information you need more easily yourself, and we've made it easier than ever to carry out some of the things you might do most often, like report a repair or pay your rent. Our **HomesHub services** have been integrated into the new site too, meaning **all of our services are now in one place**.

You'll hopefully notice that the site now **looks and feels completely different** too. As part of the project to redesign the website we felt it was a good time to undertake a refresh to **make our brand more representative of the communities that we serve**. The customers who worked with us to design the website told us that our new look also feels more **engaging, vibrant and positive** – we hope you'll agree!

Why not take a look for yourself, go to www.plusdane.co.uk today.



feedback from our customer panel on the new website

'Excellent upgrade on the current site'

'Hit the nail on the head, well done, 10/10'

'Great improvement'

'I can only use the word fantastic'

'I will be using the new website'

'One of the easiest websites I have used'





winter campaign

**WE SECURED
£27,000**
TO HELP REACH
THOSE WHO NEED
IT MOST

Our annual Winter Campaign is well underway. We know that a lot of the challenges people have been facing over the last year have not gone away, so we are out and about to spread some festive cheer to our customers who might need a bit more of a helping hand.

Last year our campaign reached more than **3,725 customers** and we managed to secure **£27,000 from our contractors and suppliers** to help reach those who need it most. We want to do even more this year!

Similar to last year, **we are giving hampers of essential food items to those who would otherwise go without,** and providing other vital support that customers need so they don't

have to choose between heating and eating. **Our sheltered housing schemes will be getting deliveries of afternoon tea,** with a little Christmas card from us, and our supported housing teams will be working their magic again to make sure those living in temporary accommodation have an enjoyable Christmas.

We are working with our community partners to **make full use of the support they offer,** and are out and about handing toys out to families whose children would otherwise wake up on Christmas Day to no presents. **Our loneliness champions are making wellbeing calls** to check on those that want to connect, and we are supporting our residents groups to deliver some scaled back community events.



LAST YEAR
WE REACHED
3725
CUSTOMERS

We all have an opportunity...

...to make sure this year's campaign helps those that need it most.

Contact us if you are experiencing severe hardship or if you are worried about a neighbour or someone who lives on their own who would benefit from a friendly wellbeing call over Christmas, **and we'll do our best to help.**





our community centres welcome you back

VISIT THE
'IN YOUR
COMMUNITY'
PAGE OF OUR
WEBSITE

Community centres across Merseyside and Cheshire have now reopened and Plus Dane residents are once again enjoying the many activities on offer.

Meeting up again with friends and neighbours for activities such as **coffee mornings**, **craft classes**, **exercise** and **bingo** has been very much missed, but now they are open for business and looking forward to welcoming you to come along. If you would like to find out if there is a community centre in your neighbourhood you can visit the '**in your community**' page of our website in the 'you and your home' section, or contact the Engagement Team for more information on **Engagement&Partnerships** @plusdane.co.uk



Clearground is the facilities maintenance organisation we use for our window cleaning across Merseyside and Cheshire.

The Birkenhead-based firm is always on hand to help with other jobs like **communal cleaning** and **pressure washing** in our schemes too, providing an excellent service for us across Plus Dane. **Managing director Phil Piercy** said:

'We have been working with Plus Dane for two years now and really enjoy the interaction with the management team and customers'

community shops

If you are looking for a cheaper way to feed you or your family, there are a number of community shops around Cheshire and Merseyside that are able to give you a choice of quality branded food and household goods for just a few pounds. These include places like the Congleton Social Supermarket, L6 Centre in Everton, and Community Shop Halton. Many charge around £3.50 for a set number of items from what they have in stock, and these items will be worth a higher value than they cost you.

We have a **full list of community shops** on our website – take a look at **www.plusdane.co.uk** to find out more.





When we involved customers in the process of recruiting for our new Chief Executive a year ago, it was such a success we were keen to do the same when recruiting for two new positions on the Executive Team.

We formed another customer interview panel and, once again, their views were considered when the final decisions were made. Following the process Plus Dane appointed Paul Knight and Claire Ryan to join Ian Reed in leading the organisation. (see our chair's message on p3).



Feedback from the customers that took part was very positive, and they welcomed the opportunity to play a key part in appointing to the Plus Dane Leadership Team and hearing more about what each candidate could bring to strengthen the organisation.

In the next edition of Unity we will introduce you to both Claire and Paul, so you can hear about what plans they have to take Plus Dane forward and find out what makes them tick.



new homes for you: Water's Reach

Water's Reach is every bit as idyllic as it sounds. Well placed in the historic village of Hartford, a beautiful area of Cheshire just a stone's throw from Northwich. The village enjoys excellent local facilities while retaining the charm that makes Cheshire so popular and sought after.

These 2 and 3 bed homes, built by award-winning developers Redrow Homes, are available to buy through shared ownership from as little as £49,250 for a 25% share and come complete with modern bathrooms and kitchens (with integrated oven and hob) and a turfed rear garden.

Don't miss out on this fantastic opportunity to get on the property ladder!



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