Autumn 2019

More+

THE MAGAZINE FOR UNITED COMMUNITIES

FRESH PLANS

United Futures sets out our 5-year strategy

MORE ON THE WAY

Building homes in Bristol

ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19

What we did and what we spent

MORE THAN JUST A ROOF

Welcome

A MESSAGE FROM ANNA

First, a big thank you to our outgoing Chief Executive, Oona, who moved on in September. Take a trip down memory lane with us as we explore her amazing legacy on page 10.

Having worked as Finance Director for 4 years I am delighted to take on the role of Chief Executive as we launch our strategic plan for 2019-24, called United Futures. More on this below.

We also share news of our Tenancy Impact Team, helping residents through difficult patches, and celebrate our Future Bright work and training, which can help you increase earnings and develop your career. It's working so well that the project has funding for three more years!

Anna Klimczak

Get in touch.
Call 0117 942 4600

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HOME CHECK
Energy efficiency update requires home visits
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WE STAND WITH YOU
Careers, training, money worries... ask us for help
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PEOPLE FIRST
How we invest in 'community-led' housing
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IT'S ON OUR WEBSITE
More than just a roof
unitedcommunities.org.uk

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Our next 5 years...

United Futures is our latest strategic plan for better homes, improved customer service, a diverse workforce and much more.

In September we launched our business plan for 2019 to 2024. It sets out in detail how we will develop homes, increase people power and maintain our financial strength. It builds on our progress and spells out how we will continue to offer 'More than just a roof' in everything we do.

Our plan includes finishing the 500+ homes we are already building in Bristol (see page 9 for updates) and improving the quality of existing homes. It set targets for more affordable homes and puts residents at the heart of planning and decision-making.

In **United Futures** we focus on customer satisfaction and explain point by point how we will measure success against plans.

Our previous business plan period is complete and we achieved much of what we set out to do. We also had top ratings from the housing regulator for our performance.

As always, the heart of our new plan is our promise to offer 'More than just a roof'. This means that we focus on having a positive impact on residents' lives by investing in homes, communities and individuals. See page 6 for how this can work for you today.

Read and download the United Futures 5-year plan on our website and get in touch if you would like to find out more.

unitedcommunities.org.uk/united-futures

Lift off! Pioneering project welcomes young residents

Launchpad brings students, keyworkers and young people together in a safe, affordable and beautiful home environment.

Modular affordable housing that can be quickly installed became a reality in Fishponds, Bristol, this autumn.

The pioneering Launchpad project aimed at students, keyworkers and young people is the first of its kind in the UK. It is designed to help people break out of student rentals, supported housing and overpriced accommodation and instead to bring them together in communities that build wellbeing and offer the best start in life.

Launchpad is the first of its kind in the UK

The first residents began to move in this September.

Launchpad is a partnership between United Communities, 1625 Independent People (1625ip) and the University of Bristol Students' Union. It brings 31 young people – students, keyworkers and 1625ip service users – together for mutual benefit and the stability of a safe and affordable home.

The contemporary housing and mixed community is designed so young people can learn from and encourage one another to achieve their goals and contribute to their community.

CONFERENCE 2019 PUTS FOCUS ON STANDARDS

Thank you to all who joined us for our conference back in May. Resident views shared at this year's event have already fed into our next business plan United Futures (see left), and informed our approach to three key important areas of work: communal area standards (see page 5); re-lets and new-build rental standards; and management of fly-tipping and waste.

Join our feedback group

United Voices

The residents group we consult for comment ahead of our decisions is called United Voices. It is open to new members and easy to join. Email:daniellej@unitedcommunities.org.uk or call 0117 942 4600 and ask for United Voices.

Coming soon...

ELDERBERRY WALK
SOUTHMEAD, BRISTOL

1 and 2 bed apartments and 2, 3 and 4 bed houses are offered for sale, shared ownership, rent-to-buy and ethical rent. elderberrywalk.co.uk

Phone survey in New Year

Early in 2020 we will ask a randomly selected group of tenants to complete our annual survey. We encourage all residents asked to complete the survey. Results are used to improve everything from customer service to repairs. The survey is by phone from a company called Acuity. Contact Danielle Jones, our new Resident Engagement Officer (see below), if you have any questions.

DANIELLE IS HERE FOR RESIDENTS

United Voices and many other residents will be getting to know our new Resident Engagement Officer, Danielle Jones, who joined in October.

Danielle used to work for the city's largest community transport operator and has a background in not-for-profit and charitable organisations.

"I am excited to join United Communities," said Danielle. "I am really looking forward to engaging with residents and building relationships with the community. My aim is to focus strongly on our strategic plan and bring customer satisfaction to the heart of what we do."

Email: daniellej@unitedcommunities.org.uk.

BRAVERY AND HEART

This issue we look to St Paul's and Easton to celebrate those who build bridges and share cultural riches in the city

St Paul's

Seven Saints at the heart of our story

Saint of St Paul's Barbara Dettering is celebrated for her support of local families over decades and as a hero in our own housing story.

The Seven Saints of St Paul's celebrated on murals and a heritage trail also hold a very special place in our own history as a housing association.

Seven prominent walls in St Paul's are painted with colourful and poignant murals celebrating the founders of the St Paul's Carnival. All the Saints were pioneers in fighting racism in Bristol in the 1960s.

United Communities funded and provided the first wall for artist Michele Curtis (facebook.com/MicheleCurtisArtist) in 2016 to create the tribute artwork to Owen Henry, one of our founders. From there Michele was able to secure Arts Council funding for the six further portraits and a phone app to lead you round the trail. The work was completed ahead of the 2019 Carnival.

During the 1960s there was a great deal of open racial discrimination in Bristol, so in 1963 Owen and others started the Commonwealth Co-ordinated Committee to highlight the problem. In 1968 the Committee formed the St Paul's Festival Committee. From there emerged United Housing Association (UHA), to meet the needs of the BAME community. Later, UHA merged with another association to become United Communities.

Owen Henry, driving force in the 1960s anti-racism movement that founded St Paul's Carnival, is one of the Seven Saints by Michele Curtis.
Image: Bhagesh Sachania

On Tudor Road, another of our properties, we funded scaffolding and wall preparation for the mural of Barbara Dettering, 79, another UHA founder. Barbara helped hundreds of local families during her time as a social worker, and says she is pleased to be among the Seven Saints. "I feel honoured because I've worked for years in St Paul's," she said.

The Saints include Carmen Beckford, Dolores Campbell, Barbara Dettering, Clifford Drummond, Audley Evans, Roy Hackett and Owen Henry.

Easton

Lullaby threads woven together

Parents and their little ones came together at Easton Community Centre in September to share lullabies from around the world.

Kurdish, Iranian, Slovakian, Irish, Scottish and Cuban traditional tunes to soothe children to sleep were exchanged during the workshop, lead by musicians Roxana and Peter Vilk.

"At night, I like to imagine all the songs in different languages being sung by parents in my neighbourhood, to help send their children to sleep," said Roxana.

"I have been singing Iranian songs to my boys as lullabies since they were babies, and it is the one moment of the day when I feel this strong invisible thread connecting me back to my motherland and passing that heritage on to my children."

Soft rock: lullaby workshop shares songs from across the world.
Image: Alexa Ledecky for Trinity Centre

Easton

Blooms in waiting at Roshni Ghar

The beautiful garden at this shared residence in Easton will bring fresh delights next spring thanks to a social and planting workshop attended by residents.

Housing officer Meg Tavener set up the gardening event to plant bulbs and to chat to members of the Alzheimer's Society, who gave information and guidance on dementia.

Looking ahead: shared planting event and a chat with the Alzheimer's Society.

Big thanks to all who attended. We hope your green-fingered energy will inspire other residents and communities to seek similar workshops.

Want an event or community get-together? We are keen to support resident ideas. Contact your Housing Officer to get the ball rolling.

Face-lift for our Home Repairs Service

Our Home Repairs Service has changed – but only on the outside! We still have the same repairs team.

We have upgraded our vehicles to improve repairs services and become more efficient. And we have smart new colours.

By the time you read this around 100 new vehicles will be on the road, painted in the grey, black and blue design shown here. The vans have better racking, to improve stock control, and they use less fuel, saving 14% over the old vans.

The uniform has changed too. Repairs staff now wear black jackets and grey t-shirts, all showing the words 'Home Repairs Service'.

All operatives show their ID when visiting your home, so don't let anyone in unless you have seen ID. If in doubt, call us before you open the door.

Home check of energy performance

We are renewing many of our Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) and some residents can expect a home visit.

The EPC assesses the energy efficiency of your property and recommends ways it could be improved. We must provide these to tenants by law.

We have appointed a contractor called Ellipse Energy to do the work. The review requires a home visit. If your home needs to be reviewed, you will be sent a letter by Ellipse Energy. If you get a letter and want to confirm it is valid, please contact us.

SERVICE CHARGE PUT THROUGH 'FITNESS TEST'

In 2018 only 57% of residents were satisfied with the service charge so we are taking steps to make things fairer, more transparent and easier to understand for our 100 schemes.

We appointed a new contractor for cleaning and groundwork and residents have been invited to join a group to monitor this work. In October our internal processes were assessed by an independent specialist. The findings from this 'fitness test' have been used to build an action plan.

Next we will consult residents to help shape standards going forward. All 900 residents who pay these charges will be invited to be involved in this stage of the work. To have your say please call **Danielle** on **0117 942 4600** or email: **daniellej@unitedcommunities.org.uk**

How to report a repair

Fill out a form online or:

Call 0117 942 4600

Text 07779 149 149

Email: repairs@unitedcommunities.org.uk

Swapping homes is FREE so don't be the one to pay

Mutual exchange is open to all residents, but no money should change hands to settle a deal. We pay for all residents to have membership of the national website homeswapper.co.uk.

We have noticed that more tenants are discussing money for an exchange, but it is illegal to charge a fee for this. If we find evidence that a fee has been charged, we will take legal action and you could face eviction.

If you know of anyone charging a fee to exchange, please tell the landlord. If you are concerned about any related issues or you have experienced a fee payment for exchange, please contact your Housing Officer for advice.

In 2018-19 we spent £31,600 on internal decoration. Find out where else we invested – read our annual report on page 8.

OUR 'MORE THAN' PROMISE

M ake a difference

We always ask ourselves how we can improve things through our work.

O pen to opportunity

We welcome new ideas and we take a 'can do' approach in our work.

R espect for all

We are empathetic and caring and take time to understand other views.

E mpower residents + communities

We offer residents opportunities in their lives and their neighbourhoods.

T hrive through partnership

We are proud of how we achieve more with our partners than on our own.

H onest + ethical

We take an open, sincere approach and always seek to do the right thing.

A mbitious + innovative

We constantly try to improve services in new and different ways.

N eighbour-hoods + homes at our heart

We support our communities and look for ways to bring people together.

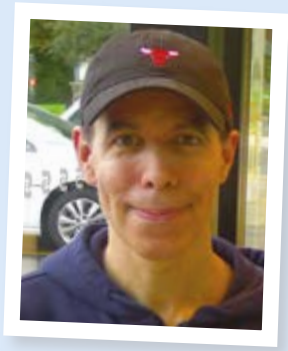
United Communities is built around our 'More than' promise, which puts people at our heart as a focus for action. Here we explain what our promise means and how it can work to support you as a resident.

Small steps bring dream job

Working in temporary contracts, Shaun Cooke (right) had struggled some months to pay his rent. Then he sought some advice from Future Bright.

The Future Bright Career Progression Coach Mike (bottom right) worked with Shaun to update his CV and apply for new roles.

After some practice interviews, Shaun was offered a job and he was over the moon. He really enjoys the new role and has stability to help him to manage his finances better.



"I was in a bit of a rut. Working with Mike really improved my confidence and showed me how my skills and experience could be applied. I love my new job!" *Shaun Cooke (left)*

"Shaun is a great example of how Future Bright works to your strengths, to help you develop your career and increase income." *Coach Mike (right)*

It's your turn to plan a better future

FUTURE BRIGHT Support Advice Skills

Future Bright offers FREE career coaching, training and support to help you develop the skills and confidence you need to progress at work and improve your pay. It is available via United Communities.

We have 4 Careers Progression Coaches at United Communities ready to work with you. Get in touch and you can expect:

- **Support** from your coach to help you create an action plan.
- **Better skills** with our help – training or opportunities at work.
- **A personal budget** to pay for training and equipment to reach your goals.

You can apply if you meet the following criteria and want to improve your income or fancy a change of direction:

- Aged 19 or over
- Living in the West of England
- In paid work
- Receiving benefits or tax credits

Call 0117 942 4600 or email: futurebright@unitedcommunities.org.uk

BUILDING SKILLS FOR SUPPORT

Our Tenancy Impact Officers support social work students from local universities.

We offer them vital experience and ensure housing support is a full part of social care and training. We have 4 students placed with us until February, so we can help more residents to access our Tenancy Impact Team over the winter. See right for details.

NEED SOME SUPPORT RIGHT NOW? OUR TENANCY IMPACT TEAM CAN HELP

We help residents who are in need. If you are struggling and need support, contact your Housing Officer. They will understand your situation and refer you to the Tenancy Impact Team. We can help with:

MONEY + BENEFITS

Bills, claims, debt, white goods... We can support you and help you to become independent.

PHYSICAL, EMOTIONAL + MENTAL WELLBEING

GP, dentist, adapt your home, healthy eating, quit smoking, substance misuse... We are networked with specialists who offer the right support.

EMPLOYMENT + TRAINING

CV, job applications, interviews, IT access, volunteering, education and training... We offer Future Bright (left) and other services for your needs.

DOMESTIC ABUSE, HATE CRIME + ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

We work in confidence to support you against extreme behaviour.

ISOLATION + LONELINESS

We can help you access groups, classes and events – and join the social media community.

PROPERTY + MAINTENANCE

Our team helps to empower tenants to report repairs issues and maintain their home.

CALL 0117 942 4600

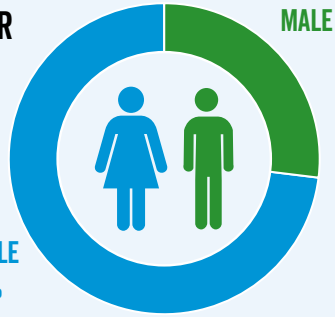
or speak to your Housing Officer.

THE BIG PICTURE

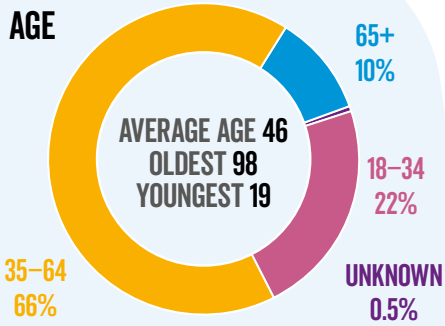
Find out how we invest in homes, communities and people. Each autumn we publish a summary of our work, including details of our income and spending, so you can see where the money goes.

OUR RESIDENTS

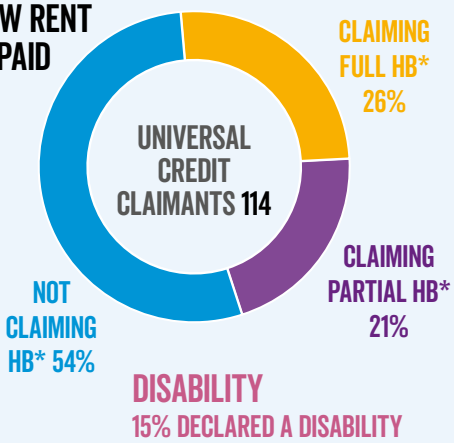
GENDER



AGE



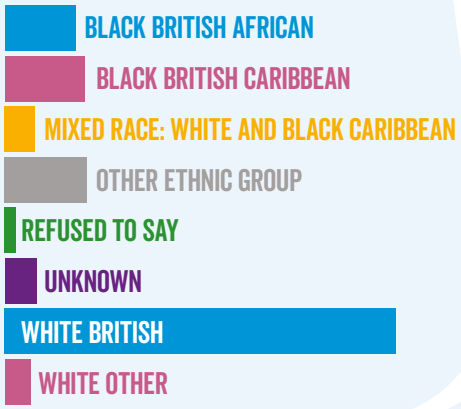
HOW RENT IS PAID



DISABILITY

15% DECLARED A DISABILITY

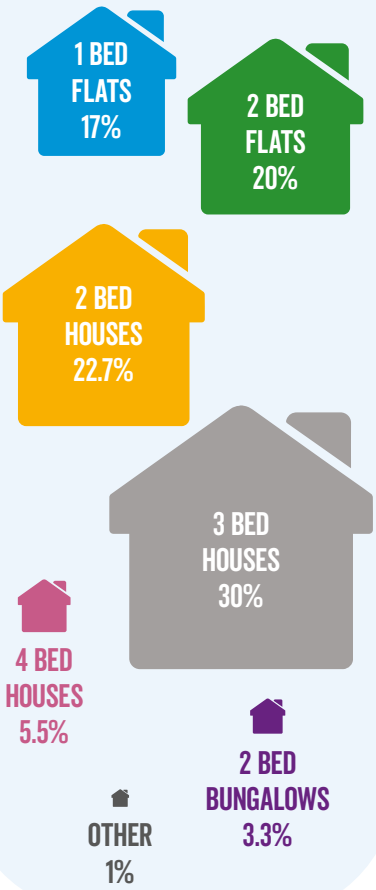
ETHNICITY



*HB = HOUSING BENEFIT

OUR HOMES

We currently own and manage 1,804 homes for rent (as below) and 87 for shared ownership.



WHERE OUR MONEY CAME FROM AND WHAT WE SPENT IT ON

MONEY IN	£
RENT AND SERVICE CHARGES	10,040,000
SHARED OWNERSHIP	1,334,000
GRANTS	650,000
OTHER INCOME	299,000
FINANCE INCOME	65,000
	12,388,000

MONEY OUT	£
REPAIRS	2,577,000
INTEREST ON LOANS	2,297,000
BUILDING NEW PROPERTIES	1,650,000
STAFF AND OFFICE COSTS	1,417,000
PLANNED WORKS	666,000
SERVICE CHARGES	507,000
OTHER	337,000
	9,451,000

WE RAISED £112,679* TO FUND OUR FUTURE BRIGHT TEAM AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ROLE

We also supported the following events in our communities:

- Up Our Street Thank You Awards
- Unity Festival
- Somali Week Festival
- Horfield's Got Talent
- LPW children's summer activities
- Refugee Festival
- Chinese New Year activities
- Winter fuel payments

SPENDING ON PLANNED WORKS 2018-19

BOILERS £300,011

EMPTY PROPERTY RELETS £155,678

FIRE SAFETY £153,982

KITCHENS £91,942

EXTERNAL DECORATION £70,000

WINDOWS + DOORS £62,185

ELECTRICAL HEATING UPGRADES £56,000

AIDS AND ADAPTATIONS £34,922

INTERNAL DECORATION £31,600

BATHROOMS £30,423

OUR TENANCY IMPACT TEAM RAISED £24,926*

To support tenants with:

- **Moving costs**
- **Transport to appointments**
- **Carpets and flooring**
- **Furnishing**
- **Disability aids**

* Money raised via grants

NEW HOMES

50 Lockleaze
Breaking ground at Shaldon Road

Nearly 1,000 lorries of earth were removed from the site so building could begin in September. This community-led project includes solar energy, ground source heat pumps, electric car charging and a car share scheme. Wildlife corridors and green spaces will encourage biodiversity, and walking and cycle routes have priority over the car.

161 Southmead
Raising the roof

Roofs are going on at Elderberry Walk. Phase 1 of the 161 new homes will be complete in Spring 2020.
See page 3 for shared ownership opportunities.

50 St Phillips
In the mix

Our plans for affordable rent and shared ownership homes and commercial units in Old Market had a thumbs-up in June. Work begins soon.

36 Lawrence Weston
People powered

We have joined forces with Ambition Lawrence Weston on plans for affordable homes on the former Astry Close site, including two self-build plots.

29 Bedminster
Healthy start

Proposals for homes to replace the old St John Health Centre target the housing waiting list, to directly tackle the Bristol housing crisis.

NEXT CHALLENGE IS CLOSE TO MY HEART

After 16 years leading the team, United Communities Chief Executive Oona Goldsworthy has moved to become Brunelcare CEO. We are sad to see her go but celebrate her amazing legacy.

Breaking ground in Gainsborough Square, Lockleaze, in 2013.

Dear United Communities

Leaving was a huge decision for me. I have been so fortunate to work with fantastic people and get to know some truly inspiring residents.

There is still much to do: completing the 500 new homes being built, supporting tenants and communities, and looking ahead with an ambitious five-year plan.

My personal highlights include the thrill of handing over keys to a new home in Horfield every week, winning *Best public sector organisation in the UK* in 2006, helping to regenerate Gainsborough Square in Lockleaze, and BCHF coming together with United HA in 2013 to form United Communities.

How many people go home most nights thinking how lucky they are in what they do?

It's always a tricky decision to know when to move on. This new challenge is close to my heart. At Brunelcare I am inspired by my personal experience of caring to provide kind and high-quality support for our elders.

How many people go home thinking how lucky they are in what they do?

Over the years I have learned so much from residents. The first tenant chair of BCHF, Peter Farr, told me to always be honest with residents and only ask a question when you genuinely want the answer. I have always tried to follow that advice.

Then Amy Boyd wrote to me last year to say what a social housing tenancy had meant for her family, giving her the security to start a new career and her children a stable place to grow up, without a move every six months. For me that's always been what it's all about. Without a safe and secure home, everything else in life can be much more impossible.

I miss you all but look forward to watching you flourish.

O. Goldsworthy

Will and Pearl raised a glass at Oona's leaving party at the Old Library, Eastville.

Fond fairwells from us all at Oona's party in September.

LOCAL PEOPLE LEAD THE WAY IN DESIGN OF NEW HOMES

BCHF staff in 2005. Later BCHF joined with United HA and United Communities was born, with Oona at the helm.

The new Horfield estate in 2008.

Taking our **Homes for Britain** campaign to Westminster in 2015.

Oona showing Gainsborough Square to Grand Designs presenter Kevin McCloud in 2016.

Our commitment to build affordable housing includes strong support for community-led projects. We aim to see 30% of new homes coming from these partnerships by 2024.

Communities are key in all that we do here at United Communities, and this includes the development of our new homes. Our first community-led scheme was back in 2016, when we provided development services for Bristol Community Land Trust (BCLT) to create 12 new homes in Fishponds. This first taste of a community-led scheme was a success and the Fishponds development captured the ambition and enthusiasm of the community – residents even helped finish their new homes to increase their equity 'share' and reduce the cost.

We are office neighbours with BCLT and we provide the community housing hub, which helps us to partner and mentor other organisations. Our latest joint project brings 50 homes for Lockleaze, planned around low-carbon living, sustainable travel and biodiversity.

Releasing land is an efficient long-term investment

Community-led schemes are often well positioned to re-purpose land. Sites passed over by commercial developers do not deter local people from developing to their own need. Releasing land is an efficient long-term investment in communities. It also puts local values, knowledge, trust and skills to the fore in house-building and supports the local economy.

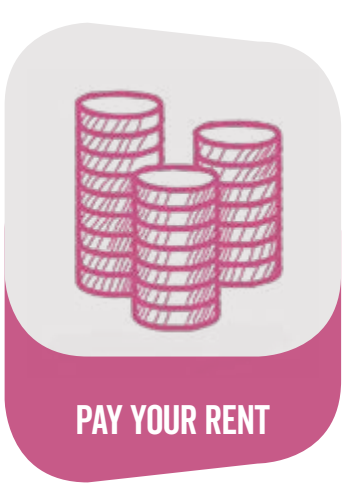
Policy makers are realising the potential of the Community Land Trust model, which accounted for less than 0.3% of new housing in 2018 and was given a £163 million government boost via the Community Housing Fund. In 2019 more funds were put in place to encourage startups.

It's not hard to see why this is close to our heart, and as a smaller housing association we are flexible to respond. Our current partnership projects include 36 homes with Ambition Lawrence Weston and 120 homes supporting the UK's largest community-led regeneration scheme, in Glencoyne Square, where we are working with the Southmead Development Trust and another registered provider, Yarlington Housing Group.

For us it is clear: one sustainable way to tackle our housing crisis is to support the active communities that lead from within.

FIND LINKS TO ALL OUR SERVICES ONLINE

unitedcommunities.org.uk



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OFFICE OPENING HOURS

Appointments can be made outside of these hours

Monday Tuesday Thursday
9.00am – 5.00pm
Wednesday
10.30am – 5.00pm
Friday
9.00am – 4.30pm

Out of hours emergencies
0800 054 2180

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