

Issue 54 | Summer 2026

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unity

customer magazine

Plus Dane Housing



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Golden
Community
Impact
Fund

Vote for
your Trades
Star of
the Year!

Meet our
Customer
Team

Welcome to the summer edition of Unity

I am really excited that we are able to share some of the great work that has been delivered by our customers as part of the Golden Community Impact Fund. This was launched last year as part of our 50th anniversary celebrations and it's been great to see the the difference it has made across Cheshire and Merseyside.

Also in this edition, having recently made some changes to our Customer Experience team, we are introducing you to some of the team members that are on hand to support you.

Sadly, we have seen a rise in hate crime in recent times, so we have included some information on how you can report it and what support is available if you experience anything of that nature.



Max Steinberg
Chair, Plus Dane Housing

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You can contact us with any feedback or suggestions for what you would like to see in Unity magazine at communications@plusdane.co.uk



TRADES STAR OF THE YEAR

We're inviting customers to help us recognise our repairs colleagues who go the extra mile. If you've had a repair carried out at your home, and you feel like the operative delivered exceptional service, please **nominate them for our Trades Star of the Year award**.

You don't need to know the operative's name – just tell us roughly **when they visited, what they fixed, and what made the experience stand out** (did they show professionalism, reliability, clear communication, care and attention to detail, or simply exceeding expectations), we can match it to our records.

Email your nomination to communications@plusdane.co.uk, including your address and a daytime contact number in case we need to clarify any details.

The **closing date for nominations is midnight on Sunday 23 August** and the winner will be announced at our colleague awards in September.



When you need to get in touch with us, our brilliant Customer team is your first port of call, whether by phone, email or WhatsApp.

Over the last year, we have been looking at how we manage customer communications and enquiries, and recently made changes to the team to make sure we continue to offer you the best possible support.

As part of this, what we used to call the Customer Access team is now simply the Customer team, and our colleagues are now Customer Experience Specialists.



We aim to:

- have a trusted service that is consistent, transparent and honest
- tailor our services by understanding your needs, and
- have an easy and accessible service, resolving as much as possible at first point of contact.

The new team is a key part of making sure we meet those aims, as part of our commitment to making it easy for you to get things done.



extra help with childcare funding

If you have primary school aged-children, tax-free childcare vouchers can make your money go further, especially in the school holidays.

When you set up an account on the gov.uk website, the government will top up the money you pay in by 20% - **meaning for every £8 you put in, you will get an extra £2.** You can use this to pay for childminders, nurseries, after school clubs, holiday clubs and more, but you must use an approved childcare provider – check first before you book a place.

The total top up you can get for each child is £500 every 3 months (up to £2,000 a year). This goes up to £1,000 every 3 months if your child is disabled (up to £4,000 a year). You will usually need to be working or returning to work, and your child must be 11 or younger (16 or younger if they are disabled).



New monthly drop-ins in Sandbach



Our Welfare team is busy getting out and about in our communities, and has started up a new monthly drop-in at Sandbach Foodbank in The Wesley Centre. They will be there to help with any questions or worries you may have about benefits, money, the cost of living and more.

The next sessions are July 16, August 20, and September 17, between 10am and 12pm, and you can just turn up.



Child Age Milestones and Your Benefits - What You Need to Know

Did you know if you are a parent claiming benefits, when your child reaches certain ages, this can affect what you receive?

Between 3 to 4 years, your child may qualify for 15 or 30 hours free childcare. Other key milestones are school age, turning 16, and when they are 18.

Keeping your details up to date helps avoid overpayments or missed support. Don't forget to update your Universal Credit journal or contact your benefit provider when your child:

- **Is born or adopted.**
- **Starts or leaves school, college, or training (you will need proof of this if your child is 16 – 19).**
- **Turns 16, 18, or finishes education.**

If you need help with this, call our Welfare Team on

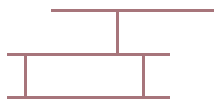
0151 459 6255

use the self-referral link on our website, or the customer portal.



Help in an emergency

The Crisis and Resilience Fund was launched earlier this year to replace the Household Support Fund. It offers grants, via local councils, to low-income households for immediate financial emergencies, food, and energy bills, while also providing support to build long-term financial resilience. Check with your local authority website if this could help you.



summer safety in the garden

In the summer barbecues are always popular, the fire service offers this advice:

- **Never** place fire pits, chimineas, barbecues or candles too close to gazebos, sheds, fences, trees, bushes or anything else that could catch fire.
- **Never** use petrol or paraffin to start or revive a fire or barbecue. Only use recognised lighters or starter fuel on coals.
- **Never** leave a barbecue unattended. Don't leave them to smoulder, make sure they are completely out before leaving them.
- **Don't** empty the barbecue or its ashes and embers into a dustbin or wheelie bin. If they're hot, they can melt the plastic and start a fire.
- **Keep** a bucket of water, sand or garden hose nearby for emergencies.



If you have outdoor lighting or other electrical equipment in your garden, make sure they meet British Standards, the safety guidelines that let you know electrical products are safe. **Turn them off when not in use.**

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.

Avoid overloading sockets and plugs - these could overheat and cause potential hazards.

In the water

Paddling pools, hot tubs and ponds can pose risks in the summer, especially to young children.



The Royal Life Saving Society uses the acronym SAFE:

Supervise at all times – make sure children are never left alone near water.

After use, cover it – if you are not draining your pool or hot tub, cover it over, and lock this if you can.

Fence it, gate it, or grill it – Make sure garden gates are always locked. Put mesh or a grill over ponds, water features, troughs, and water butts.

Empty it, turn it – after use, empty out your pool and turn it upside down to prevent accidents.

When using hot tubs in the garden, to avoid accidents make sure you are hydrated - avoid taking medication that may make you drowsy or drinking alcohol, as both can dehydrate you and make you dizzy and feel sick in the warm water. It is recommended that you don't stay in for more than 15 minutes at a time.

Keep the area around the entry to the hot tub clean and clear to prevent trips and falls – rubber matting where you get in and out can help with this. Children under 5 should never be allowed in a hot tub.

Did you know that hosepipes which are incorrectly fitted, or left submerged in places like ponds, watering cans or paddling pools, can cause illness because the dirty water can backflow into the drinking water supply?

It is recommended that you fit an approved double check valve to hosepipes to prevent any water, or contaminants from the garden, ponds or paddling pools, flowing back into your mains drinking water supply; and turn off your hosepipe at the tap and ideally fully disconnect it when not in use.



the Golden Community Impact Fund



To celebrate the 50th anniversary year of Plus Dane, we set up the Golden Community Impact Fund, offering 50 grants of up to £1000 to support our local communities. We were proud and delighted to see how many people came forward with brilliant ideas to make where they live a better place.

From Congleton to Toxteth, Malpas to Maghull and everywhere in between across Merseyside and Cheshire, the fund helped to support a wide variety of projects for all ages.

Everything from boxing clubs to baby baskets, tea parties in our sheltered accommodation to a mobile food pantry, Black History Month celebrations, gardening projects, community days and playgroups all benefitted from the fund.

2025/26 saw us celebrate our 50th year. Plus Dane as we know it today started as CDS in Liverpool,

which later became Plus, and Dane Housing in Cheshire. The two organisations merged in 2008.

Chair of our Board Max Steinberg came up with the idea for the fund. He said: “It was wonderful to see how the Golden Community Impact Fund took off and made a positive difference. We have some fantastic customers and interest groups in our neighbourhoods who are out there doing great things for others, and we are really pleased to have been able to give them a little help along the way.”

Some of our Golden Community Impact Fund recipients were:



The Young at Heart community group in Sandbach, Cheshire, a residents group that was set up to reduce loneliness and bring people together. They used their money to replace a bench outside the Union Street Community Centre, plant new flowers, and replace other worn out equipment.

Sutton and Langley Lunch Club needed help with rising costs. The monthly event is inclusive and welcoming to all, particularly supporting older people, those who are isolated or lonely, and people with disabilities. Volunteers also offer transport and informal welfare ‘check-ins’.



A contribution from us helped to get a much-loved pantry van back on the road. **New Beginnings Improving Lives** is a familiar sight across Liverpool, delivering affordable fresh food, household essentials and practical support directly to people struggling with the cost of living, physical and mental health issues, and more. Their old van was more than 30 years old and vandalised beyond repair; they hit their fundraising target earlier this year to purchase a brand new vehicle.

The Big Clothes Movement hosted two preloved clothing events at Congleton Town Hall, making affordable second-hand clothes, shoes and accessories accessible to the community. The project addresses environmental sustainability and the cost-of-living crisis.



Paul Buckley, who wanted to transform the communal alleyway behind his Toxteth home. After working hard to clear the area of overgrowth and rubbish, he set to installing seating and decorations to create a colourful space for neighbours to enjoy, and even hosted a community BBQ event to celebrate. Paul says focussing on the project helped with his mental health after a tough time, and it has been a great way to bring neighbours together.

We helped community group **Unite Bridge Hope** in St Helens set up the Bakara café, a fortnightly pop-up bringing together local residents and people from refugee and asylum-seeking communities through shared food, drink and storytelling - creating a warm, welcoming space for people to connect and share heritage and personal stories.



The SPARK Fund was set up in Castlefields, Runcorn – a community ‘micro-grants’ programme created through our partnership between Wellbeing Enterprises CIC. It offered grants of up to £250 to support local residents to test simple, practical ideas that strengthen connection and community life in Castlefields, improve wellbeing, and help people feel more connected to where they live.

Squash Nutrition, a café and community space in L8, delivered a community event with gardening, creative activities, shared food and more, to bring local people together and encouraging involvement in community garden sessions.



South Cheshire CLASP was able to deliver free, inclusive holiday activities for lone parents and their children in and around Crewe during the Christmas, February half term and Easter school holidays.

A report about the community impact fund will be available to read on our website soon.



talking through **conflict**

If you have a problem with a neighbour, it might seem simple but sometimes talking can help improve things.

Neighbourhoods work best when people feel comfortable and respected in their homes.

Everyone wants to feel at ease where they live, and most of the time this is the case.

But we know that sometimes **issues around** things like **car parking, noise, pets, mess in shared areas, or just misunderstood messages**, can lead to stress and upset.

Conflict in itself isn't unusual – it's how it is handled that makes the difference. If left unresolved, even small issues can grow and have an impact on daily life.

When challenges do arise, there are constructive ways to deal with them. Mediation and conflict coaching are designed to help people talk things through, reduce tension, and find practical solutions.



Our Community Safety team works with an organisation called ADR who can help people have conversations to try and sort problems before they get worse.

This can **help both sides feel heard and understood**, helping to find a solution that works for everyone involved.

They will talk to each person separately so there is no worry about face-to-face meetings if that is not right for you, and will support you to reduce stress and move forward.



hate crime - what you can do

Hate crime is a criminal offence – and unfortunately, we have been seeing an increase in it.

Crimes committed against someone because of their disability, gender identity, race, religion or belief, or sexual orientation are hate crimes and should be reported to the police.

Hate crimes can include: threatening behaviour, assault, damage to property, and online abuse.

You should report the incident to the Police so we can work together and agree the next steps. You can report a Hate Crime that you have witnessed to the Police even when the victim is someone else.

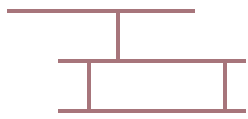
We understand that you may feel scared to speak to the person who is causing the problem. Never put yourself in danger.

You can report an incident on our ASB reporting form.



You can find help and support from the National Stop Hate UK website and 24 hour help line on 0800 138 1625.

As your landlord, if needed we can provide victims of hate crime with security measures to allow you to remain in your home and feel safe. This can include extra outdoor lights, a video doorbell, window and door alarms, and protection for your letterbox. A Plus Dane colleague will carry out a survey of your home to assess what security measures we are able to provide. Don't suffer, get in touch.



improving wellbeing in **Castlefields**

In the spring, we completed a successful project with our partners Wellbeing Enterprises in the Castlefields area of Runcorn.

We asked them to find out more about what matters to local people, hear your views and give you the opportunity to help plan the future of the neighbourhood.

Following on from three consultation events earlier in the year, Wellbeing Enterprises then held a special community event to celebrate the project and start to shape what happens next.

This included the SPARK Fund a community 'micro-grants' programme that offered grants of up to £250 to support local people in testing

simple, practical ideas to strengthen connection and community life in Castlefields, improve wellbeing, and help people feel more connected to where they live.

Mark Swift, CEO of Wellbeing Enterprises CIC, said: "Through the consultation, residents spoke very clearly about wanting to be more involved, more connected, and to play a greater role in shaping the future of Castlefields. We want residents to feel that they can take action and make a difference."



the future of **Jobs Plus**

Jobs Plus in Toxteth was set up by Plus Dane in partnership with Transform Lives. What began as a pilot project has become an overwhelming success in the area, and we are delighted that we have secured funding for it to continue into a third year!

Jobs Plus uses tailored, personalised support to help people from across 24 streets in the L8 area into work and training. There are currently more than 150 people registered with the service, with 36 people in employment as a result. The project

has brought more than half a million pounds in wages into the neighbourhood!

And there's more good news. As demand increased for the high-quality, person-centred support Jobs Plus offers, its home at the Irene Milson Resource Centre in Kelvin Grove was running out of space. Now, thanks to our partner contractors Travis Perkins Managed Services and Heron Constructive Solutions, we have created a new safe, warm, confidential space for customers in the form of an independent garden pod behind the main building to hold more meetings and help more people.



Scan the QR code to watch a film about the work of Jobs Plus.



stay safe from **doorstep scams**

We've recently heard of instances where people may be posing as contractors and asking for money at customers' doors.

Please remember:

- We'll usually agree an appointment with you in advance
- Our staff and contractors will always carry ID
- You can call us to check any time on 0800 169 2988
- We will never ask for payment at your door

If you're unsure, don't let anyone in and contact us straight away.



Customer Assurance Panel (CAP) update

Our Customer Assurance Panel is made up of nine customers from across Plus Dane, and we meet every three months to assure Board that Plus Dane is doing what it says it's doing. We look at Plus Dane's Tenant Satisfaction Measures to see how it's performing and report our findings back to Board.

Rachael Johnston Chair



“ At our recent CAP meeting we discussed the increasing numbers of customers using AI to submit complaints. We suggested promoting the benefits of AI to customers but that Plus Dane should be cautious because although it can help with communication, AI cannot always understand the complexities of a complaint.

We were pleased to see that the total number of complaint cases have reduced slightly from the previous year, although the number of Stage 2 complaints had increased. Even though this is

happening to other housing associations, we have asked to be updated of the findings from an internal deep dive so we can look at the reasons why this might be.

We were also encouraged to see repairs performance targets are being met in what is the busiest time of the year for Plus Dane. We stressed the importance of this continuing with repairs even though these are still challenging times.”

Repairs appointments - our new way of working

If you've had a repair done in your home in the last few weeks, you may have noticed we have a new way of working that is designed to make things easier for us – and you!

Our new system is helping us to understand the needs of each job better, so we know how many of our colleagues need to attend, what they need to do the work, and how long it should take to finish.

It is already improving the way we communicate with you, too. Our Customer team now has instant access to all available appointments, so you don't have to wait when you get in touch.

Now, when we book a repair you will get a confirmation text or email, with a link that you can use to change your appointment yourself if you need to.

We will send reminders the day before and the morning of your appointment, and follow this up with a 'see you soon' message to let you know exactly when we are on our way.

Our new system helps our repairs operatives to be better prepared, with the right skills and materials to complete your job.

And when the repair is completed in your home, we will send you a satisfaction survey so you can let us know how it went.

We look forward to you seeing the difference of our new way of working.





protecting your things with **contents insurance**

No matter how careful you are, there's always a risk your belongings could be broken, damaged or stolen. Contents insurance is designed to help protect your things, and having the right insurance in place can help protect you from potential risks.

The My Home Contents Insurance Scheme was set up by the National Housing Federation and Thistle Tenant Risks, to provide contents insurance especially for housing association customers. It can

cover most of your household contents such as furniture, carpets, curtains, clothes, bedding, electrical items, jewellery, pictures and ornaments against loss and damage caused by specific events such as, burst pipes, fire, theft, flood damage, and more.

The policy includes coverage of up to £500 for the replacement and installation of locks for external doors and windows if your keys are lost or stolen, and can even cover the contents of your fridge and freezer in the case of a power cut, for example.

Optional extras are available at an extra cost too. Get a quote today at www.thistlemyhome.co.uk

the complaints process



We understand that sometimes, despite our best efforts, things may go wrong and you may wish to submit a complaint.

If you have a problem, please let us know as soon as possible so we can take steps to put things right, learn from the issue, and make improvements. Our complaints procedure is designed to handle problems quickly and fairly.

You can see a more detailed process chart on our website or by scanning the QR code below:



a new collection of modern homes at Foundry Lane, Widnes

HomesHub by Plus Dane is excited to bring **30 brand new homes to Widnes**, available through **Shared Ownership at the Foundry Lane development**.

Offering a selection of well-designed 2- and 3-bedroom houses, these homes are ideal for modern living, with bright interiors, contemporary kitchens, stylish bathrooms and practical layouts designed to work for everyday life. Each home also benefits from a private garden, parking and energy-efficient features to help keep running costs lower.

With Shared Ownership shares available from 10% up to 75%, this development offers an affordable way to buy a brand new home. Whether you're buying for the first time, looking for more space or ready for your next move, **Foundry Lane could be the perfect place to start your home ownership journey.**



Register interest now on our website at www.plusdane.co.uk/find-a-home/homes-to-buy

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portal



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