

# unipol

## Chair of Trustees

### Applicant Information Pack



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# Dear applicant,

I am delighted you are interested in joining the Board of Unipol Student Homes as we search for a new Chair and an additional Trustee.

Unipol is a unique and influential charity at the forefront of student housing in the UK since 1973, with a turnover of £24 million, over 3,900 tenants and 72 staff. The new Chief Executive Sam Bailey-Watts took up his post in May 2025 and is leading the charity through an exciting period of strategic development.

The charity is based in Leeds but has national impact in its specialist area, operating Government approved Codes of Practice for the purpose-built accommodation sector, but also providing thought-leadership through its policy and research work. It has a diverse housing portfolio covering the range of students, from family housing through to high-rise PBSA.

As I step down, the Charity is looking to appoint a new Chair who shares the ambition and values of the Charity and Trustee Board, and can make a significant contribution to ensuring its continued success and development. At the same time we are also seeking another Trustee to join the Board, and are hoping that one of these new appointees has specific skills in finance to complement and strengthen the existing skills and profile of the Board.

Thank you once again for your interest in these roles, and we look forward to receiving your application.

**Stephen Willis**

**Outgoing Chair**



# Introduction

Unipol Student Homes is a national charity working to improve standards and experiences in student accommodation across the UK. For more than 50 years, Unipol has played a unique role at the intersection of student welfare, housing standards, and the higher education and accommodation sectors.

We are now seeking to appoint two roles, a Chair of Trustees and a Trustee. The Chair will lead our Board and support the organisation through its next phase of development, influence, and impact.

These are rewarding roles, and the Chair in particular is a high-profile position, offering the opportunity to shape the future of student accommodation policy and practice, and to support an experienced executive team delivering a clear social mission.





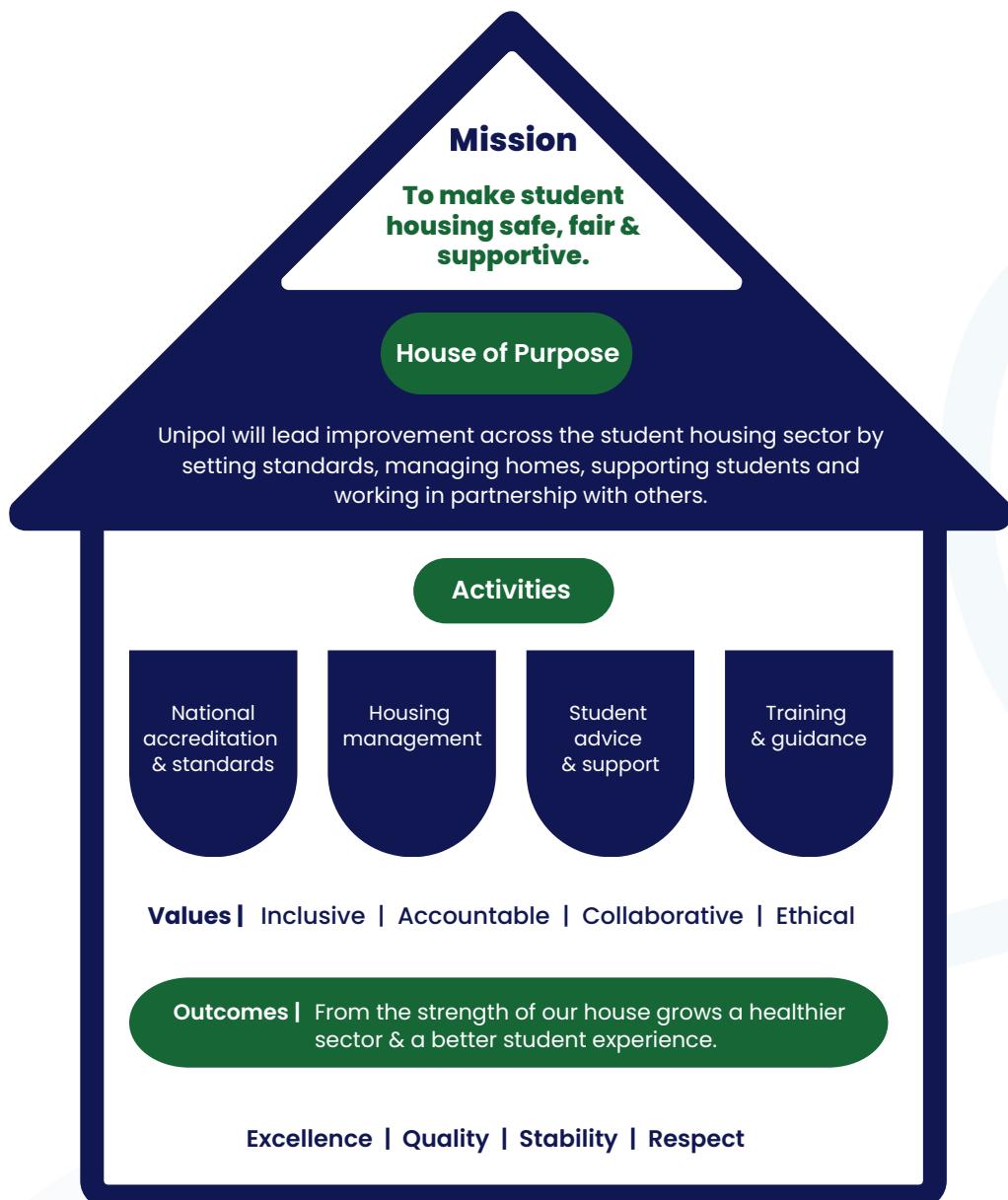
Unipol Student Homes is a registered charity and limited company. Founded in Leeds in 1973 by its four principal Members (The University of Leeds, Leeds Beckett University and their respective student unions), it has grown and today it includes:

- Acting as landlord to over 3,900 students
- Providing housing advice and support to students
- Managing and promoting student accommodation standards through self-regulation including the Unipol/ANUK National Codes
- Undertaking sector-leading research and training
- Working with universities, accommodation providers, policymakers and students to improve quality, safety and affordability in student housing

We operate nationally, with our headquarters in Leeds, and a base in Nottingham, and work with a wide range of stakeholders across higher education, local government, and the private sector.

# Unipol Purpose, Mission & Values

In 2025 Unipol's mission and vision was restated by the Trustees as follows:



You can see our current strategic document, the Forward Look 2023 – 2026, [here](#). Since the appointment of a the new CEO in May 2025, the charity is going through a process of resetting and strategic reshaping in 2026. The new Chair will be instrumental in supporting the development of a new focused but ambitious corporate strategy for 2027 – 2033.

# Our Core Operations

## Housing Hubs [Leeds and Nottingham]

We give straightforward information through our Housing Hubs that allows students to make well-informed choices about where to live and who to rent from; champion best practices; and provide housing ourselves that lives up to the expectations of Unipol as a professional and caring charity.

## Our Own Housing

Unipol's own housing portfolio is located in Leeds and Nottingham, where we accommodate some 3,900 students, including student families. Additional accommodation is managed on behalf of private owners, who are required to meet the same high standards as in Unipol-owned properties.

## Accreditation [the Unipol Codes]

In addition to the local Codes covering shared student houses in Leeds, Nottingham and Bradford, Unipol also operates the ANUK/Unipol National Code for Private Providers, an approved Code of Practice under the Housing Act 2004 which sets and tests standards in the PBSA sector. These activities seek to improve property standards, enhance student choice and bring transparency to the private rented sector. In all, these national and local accreditation schemes cover some 450,000 bed spaces.

## Training and Thought Leadership

Unipol is also the main national trainer in the niche area of student accommodation for all those involved in student accommodation provision across the UK. The training programmes keep us at the centre of the accommodation network and help to ensure we are up to speed on new trends and developments.



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# Finance and Leadership

Unipol has grown considerably in the past decade from turnover of £8 million to £24 million in 2025.

You can see our latest set of accounts [here](#).

## **Governance and Leadership**

Unipol has a Trustee Board of 19, with 13 places for nominations from its Member institutions (The University of Leeds, Leeds Beckett University, Leeds University Union and Leeds Beckett Student Union, and Bradford College). In addition it has places for 6 co-opted Trustees. This size and composition of the Board is a key aspect of consideration in the current governance review, due to make its recommendations in February 2026.

Members of the Board are both charity Trustees as well as Directors of the limited company.

The Board is committed to good standards of corporate governance and the Charity assesses itself against the Code for Larger Charities, with its most recent self-assessment available to see [here](#).

### **The Board's specific responsibilities include:**

- corporate strategy, plans and budgets;
- corporate policy and major business decisions;
- the framework for governance and management;
- monitoring organisation and executive performance.

The Board normally meets four times a year in Leeds (three business meetings and one Strategy away day).

The Board fulfils its responsibilities through a number of committees including Financial Affairs and Staffing Committee, Portfolio Committee, Review and Remunerations, Governance Committee and Health and Safety Committee. All Trustees are expected to sit on at least one committee.

## **Senior Executive Team**

The Chief Executive Officer is supported by an executive team including the Deputy Chief Executive, Director of Finance, as well as Directors for Standards, Sales and Marketing, Operations, Development and Compliance, Hub Services and IT. You can find more detail about the staff team [here](#).



## Role overview - Chair of Trustees

The Chair of Trustees provides leadership to the Board, ensuring it operates effectively, maintains high standards of governance, and supports Unipol's charitable purpose and strategic objectives. They will be joining the organisation at a pivotal time of growth, change and development.

Working closely with the Chief Executive and senior leadership team, the Chair ensures that Trustees provide appropriate challenge, oversight and support, and that Unipol remains well-governed, financially sustainable and mission-driven.

The Chair also acts as an ambassador for Unipol, representing the charity externally and helping to strengthen its influence and reputation.

### **Key Responsibilities**

#### Board Leadership and Governance

- Lead the Board of Trustees, ensuring it fulfils its legal, regulatory and fiduciary responsibilities
- Set the tone for effective governance, constructive challenge and collective decision-making
- Ensure the Board has the right balance of skills, experience and diversity
- Oversee regular evaluation of Board performance and effectiveness

## **Strategy and Oversight**

- Work with Trustees and the executive team to set and review Unipol's strategic direction
- Support the Chief Executive while holding them to account for delivery of agreed objectives
- Ensure appropriate oversight of risk management, financial sustainability and organisational performance

## **Relationship with the Executive**

- Act as line manager to the Chief Executive

## **Representation and Influence**

- Act as an ambassador and public representative for Unipol

## **Key Priorities for the Next Chair**

With a new Chief Executive, the charity is going through a period of strategic reset, with an external governance review nearing completion and a new corporate strategy, replacing the current Forward Look, due for completion in early 2027.

Other key priorities for the Chair are likely to include:

- Strengthening financial oversight and assurance, including leadership around budgeting, reserves and long-term sustainability
- Implementing the recommendations of the governance review
- Enhancing Board capability including finance and compliance experience
- Supporting strategic delivery in a complex operating environment
- Maintaining strong relationships with the executive team
- Championing Unipol's mission and values and the charity seeks to strengthen its unique work and related funding streams



# Personal Qualities

We are looking for a high calibre individual to join our Board, with broad leadership qualities who can add value across a range of topics with the remit of the Board. In respect of the role of Chair, we are keen to hear from individuals who can demonstrate a depth of experience and up-to-date expertise in financial management, strategy or accounting although this is not essential.

## **Key essential qualities we are looking for in a candidate include:**

- Commitment to Unipol's mission, vision and values
- Significant senior leadership or board experience
- Business acumen gained in a significant organisation
- Significant experience of working in the UK Higher Education sector or in an organisation partnering with the sector
- Strong understanding of good governance and a commitment to leading the Board in exercising good conduct
- Collaborative leadership style and ability to foster a culture of openness and constructive challenge on the Board
- Strategic thinking skills and the ability to absorb, evaluate and question material on a wide range of matters
- A personal commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion
- Sound and independent judgement and a belief in collective decision making responsibility
- An understanding of the distinctive ethos and regulation of the charity sector

## **Desirable**

- Student accommodation or other housing sector experience
- Experience chairing a board or committee
- Senior financial, accountancy or audit experience or strong board-level financial oversight
- Experience or knowledge of sector regulation and company law
- Experience in Marketing and sales

All Trustees need to complete a Declaration of Interests, and the Chair in particular should not have any personal interests that would conflict with this role.

## **Time Commitment & Term**

We expect the time commitment to vary, but on average it is 2 days per month spread across various activities such as preparation for board meetings, reading board papers, fortnightly 1 hour conversations with the Chief Executive, ad hoc discussions with board members and the executive team, and attending events throughout the year. The Chair sits on the Review and Remunerations and Governance Committees and is an ex-officio member of the Financial Affairs and Staffing Committee.

This appointment is for an initial three-year term, with potential reappointment for a further two terms.

## **Remuneration**

Currently this role is not remunerated, but reasonable expenses are paid. The Trustees are actively considering remuneration this role in the near future as part of the governance review, however this is subject to Charity Commission approval.

## **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

Unipol Student Homes is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion and welcomes applicants from all backgrounds.

## **How to Apply, Key Dates and Selection Process**

All interested applicants are asked to submit a CV and a short cover letter detailing their motivations for supporting the charity's work by 12 noon on 26 February 2026 to the Company Secretary Victoria Tolmie-Loverseed on [v.tolmie-loverseed@unipol.org.uk](mailto:v.tolmie-loverseed@unipol.org.uk).

Any shortlisted applicants will be invited to interview which are scheduled to take place in Leeds or virtually in w/c 9<sup>th</sup> March, as well as an informal discussion with the Chief Executive.

Any interested applicants with questions about the role can contact the Chair or Chief Executive, and this can be arranged via the Company Secretary Victoria Tolmie-Loverseed on [v.tolmie-loverseed@unipol.org.uk](mailto:v.tolmie-loverseed@unipol.org.uk).

Any recommendation to appoint will be subject to Board approval. This process is expected to take place in March 2026, with a new Chair in place ideally from April.

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