

Unipol Student Homes

Forward Look 2012 - 2015

Making Student Housing Better

unipol

the home of student housing

Introduction

The recent period of economic austerity and the new funding arrangements for students wishing to study in higher education sees Unipol's environment in ongoing transition. The charity itself must also change and adapt if it is to be worthy of strong continuing support from its users, supporters and partners.

This *Forward Look*, prepared after reflection, action, engagement and dialogue by our trustees, staff, funders and users, outlines the charity's objectives for the next three years and the priorities that will guide change and development. The aim is to concentrate around a common purpose with clear objectives.

During this process Unipol's uniqueness as a student housing organisation has, once again, been highlighted and reaffirmed. Our mission has now been distilled into the four words that form the title of this document "Making Student Housing Better". This will form a touchstone throughout the journey: giving security of purpose at a time when adaptability and fleetness of foot will be vital survival tools.

Despite the challenges and restraints the next three years will bring, those guiding and using our services have reaffirmed their commitment to Unipol's purpose and the importance of continuing to press our mission home. The next three years must be approached in the context of change *and* growth. Well placed optimism about the charity's ability to deliver both will enable the charity to look forward positively as to what more can be achieved.

Making Student Housing Better

Unipol is a multi faceted organisation with four main strands to its services:

- ✓ it provides details of private rented properties in three key student centres (Leeds, Nottingham and Bradford), displaying properties honestly and comparably together with benchmarking the standards of those properties. It ensures that student users of its services (the websites and the advice services) have real choices and that they are able to select good quality properties with confidence and knowledge.
- ✓ it provides direct housing to students in Leeds, housing 2,700 tenants (around 6% of the Leeds student market). Unipol is a unique housing provider because it houses a full cross section of students in a full cross section of properties: from first year students living in large purpose built halls, to returning students living in off street properties. It also houses postgraduates, international students and those with special housing needs, particularly those with families.
- ✓ it runs a number of accreditation schemes which aim to ensure that Code properties in the private sector are of a high standard, are well managed and have high levels of customer satisfaction. Its schemes are robust and are not simply paper or training based. A process of verification involved visits to properties and detailed measurement to the standards within the Codes. Some schemes are local (such as the Unipol Codes in Leeds and Bradford and the Unipol DASH Code in Nottingham) and some are national (the Unipol ANUK Codes for Larger Student Developments and the partnership with Accommodation for Students to deliver a National Code for off street properties.
- ✓ it trains those in the national arena on student housing issues: ranging from direct "how to" training, promotes best practice and raises policy and strategic developments that affect the future development and evolution of the whole student accommodation sector. It backs this up with a national website.

It is important to emphasise these strands and to see them fitting within a conceptual whole. Unipol is not only at the centre of student housing but it is *involved* at every level: information, advice, policy development and setting, measuring and checking standards as well as providing student accommodation itself. This 360 degree experience of the sector is essential in ensuring that Unipol practices what it preaches and the charity has an in depth understanding of the realities of the sector as it seeks to be a beacon of good practice.

All four of these strands join together to support and deliver the mission of the charity. They are not four separate functions that the charity chooses to undertake as the result of some developmental pragmatism of the past: they collectively form the essential whole experience of student accommodation that gives the charity its ability to thrive, survive and evolve.

Maintaining Economic Sustainability

Unipol is still a relatively small charity, and in the world of property is a minnow. Our influence, however, is considerable because we are seen as impartial, knowledgeable and honest. These values have informed, and will continue to inform, the evolution of the charity. It is tempting to be growth or funding driven (and the two often sit uncomfortably close together) but Unipol must always ask before it moves into any new venture: what is this contributing to the mission of the charity and what added value is it bringing to our core purpose?

There must be a balance between the services we can offer. Simply providing services for money is not enough.

It is important, however, that the issues of financial viability and sustainability are centre stage in promoting our values through our services. It is all too easy to provide services that require considerable financial input and subsidy, without considering fully where the resourcing comes from. Accreditation and the Unipol Codes are being developed at a time when Local Authorities are withdrawing from all but their statutory duties, Educational Institutions are themselves seeking to reduce their servicing costs in the face of economic uncertainty, the private sector (who have had a hard time since 2008) are looking to maximise revenue and minimise expenditure. All of these create real pressures for Unipol seeking to generate funding to maintain and grow services to ensure student housing gets better.

In housing provision, there is a need to maintain affordable rents, ensure that some students can rent more flexibly over shorter times and to maintain low cost housing for students with families. All of these put pressures to spend more and keep rental revenue down.

The charity must strike a balance between generating rental and service income responsibly whilst ensuring it has sufficient funds to meet the needs of its services. It must also allow a cushion of funding to protect the charity against unforeseen risks or developments. Most of all, it must ensure sufficient income generation to enable investment in new areas to ensure that Unipol remains at the cutting edge of the sector.

Over the next three years the trend is already very clear: income from institutions and local authorities in the form of grant aid is reducing. This currently covers 5.7% of operating expenditure and is likely to fall to 4.5% by 2015. Sponsorship and advertising will continue, but capacity for growth at this time is limited. Over the next few years Unipol will increasingly become reliant upon income it has generated for itself and that will mean through housing and service revenues.

As housing revenue strengthens as the main financial driver of the organisation, so the importance of maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction and the risk of not letting properties in a competitive market increases. To counter this Unipol must seek, as it increases its housing revenue, to strengthen its brand, continually improve its services and ensure that its touchstone remains quality and good value for money.

Strategic Objectives

The five strategic objectives for the next three years are:

Maintaining and Developing the Portfolio

Unipol's portfolio reflects part of Unipol's core purpose and is the basis for the financial viability and sustainability of the charity. The portfolio reflects the charity's management competence and style and the charity's vision of the type, variety, range and standard that good student housing should offer.

Raising Standards

Unipol will seek to extend its role in accreditation by growing all the schemes it currently operates and seeking to establish new schemes. It will seek to promote landlord engagement, training and knowledge and verification to even the most recalcitrant landlords and property managing agents. It will work with FE/HEIs, local authorities and other key organisations to achieve this in partnership with others.

Smarter Tenants

The private rented sector is a market and markets only work well if consumers have good market information. Unipol will continue raising the profile of the value of accreditation with students as consumers, ensuring that standards are known, appreciated and form the basis of purchasing decisions by those who need good quality and well managed accommodation as a key ingredient to fulfilling their academic potential.

Unipol will seek to ensure that students, know their legal rights, have their deposits protected and understand the health and safety aspects of their accommodation through planned awareness raising campaigns run in partnership with other key players, ensuring the inclusivity of the students' unions. Unipol recognises the importance that parents have in both helping in this process and appreciating the reassurance that Unipol can give them.

Investment in People, Skills and Expertise

Unipol will ensure that its staff have a commitment to the mission of the charity, are properly trained, have the right skills and are motivated and rewarded. The commitment to training, motivational and skills development will also be rolled out to the sector through our training and policy work.

Our trustees will build on their involvement and development of the charity through their system of peer review, greater strategic involvement and an increasing skills base. The governance of the charity will seek to close any skills deficit and maintain its focus on strategic leadership.

Growth and Financial Reality

Unipol will build its strategic priorities upon the proper maintenance and upgrading of the existing portfolio and the enhancement of Unipol's services to students and institutions in the context of modest growth, reflecting the geographical changes taking place in student residence patterns within Leeds. Growth is difficult to achieve at this time, but the infrastructure the charity is developing will enable further growth to be achieved without compromising either values or quality.

Growth implies investment and in order to ensure investment is adequate, some growth in service outputs are essential. It is also vital that Unipol responds, ahead of time, to the changes in the younger person's housing markets, getting the balance between affordability and quality right, the growth of professional letting and the enforced move away from owner occupation as a form of housing tenure.

Financially, the charity will seek to maintain a budget surplus year on year to build funds for ongoing and future investment and strengthen cash flow. This will also help fund a modest acquisition programme of smaller houses which aims to strengthen the asset base of the charity and build flexible reserves for the future.

Strategic Priorities 2012 - 2015

This section concentrates the results of the charity's deliberations of its clear purpose around a set of clear, detailed and realistic objectives.

The key new developments, which arch across all the strategic objectives will be to:

- invest in IT infrastructure to serve the whole organisation better
- develop a new web site for students, parents and landlords maintaining Unipol's lead as a web based information provider and extend this platform to the increasing use of hand held devices
- refocus the purpose of the Leeds Accommodation Bureau and refit the space to meet the needs of tomorrow's students
- seek to invest and develop a new service in a fourth University City where Unipol's model can see a strong service coupled with accreditation take root
- expand Unipol's tenant base from 2,700 to 3,200 ensuring the ongoing development of a lettings strategy to minimise voids
- ensure cost effective investment in Unipol's portfolio with the full refurbishment of 90 houses at an estimated cost of £2m
- continue the rolling review of governance to maintain and increase the Board's skills and involvement in the charity
- expand the range of rents available to Unipol's client group so that affordable housing is rentable within each type of accommodation available
- prioritise the development of new housing options for international students and work with others to develop some dedicated housing for on line renting with inclusive utilities and internet facilities
- maintain a supply of good quality affordable housing for students with families and work with others in engineering a further modest increase of around 12 family houses
- place sustainability at the centre of property design and tenant behaviour
- increase the development resources available within the charity to co-ordinate, control and evaluate growth.

Delivering the Strategy

This section sets out an action plan with specific and detailed objectives, arranged under the operational service heads of the charity. Progress will be monitored annually by the Board.

Developing the Unipol Property Portfolio

Leeds City Council Leased Off-Street Houses - the arrangements currently being finalised between Unipol and Leeds City Council in respect of leasing 58 properties will see £470K being invested in upgrades over the next three years with a further £724K being spent over 10 years to raise these properties well above the decent homes threshold.

Improvements in insulation and heating systems will ensure that although rents will rise slightly after refurbishment this will be offset by savings on running costs.

Unipol will use local builders and trades people to undertake these works ensuring that its funding is returned to the local economy.

Acquisition of Properties - Unipol has purchased a small number of properties since 1992 as an ongoing investment in its housing portfolio and as a flexible asset. Over the next three years Unipol will purchase 15 properties from Leeds City Council at an estimated cost of £2.5m with an investment in refurbishment of £500K. This will increase the number of Unipol's owned properties from 32 to 47, although owned properties will continue to be a small part of the overall portfolio.

These new properties will be refurbished to a 35 year life. All properties will be refurbished to emphasise the social nature of living within a larger shared houses with an emphasis being placed on good lounge space and well designed and equipped kitchens.

The charity will continue to acquire a small number of other properties based on the strength of each business case.

The Leasing of Royal Park Flats - Unipol will extend the lease for this 110 bed student development from Connect from August 2012 for a further five years and will spend £272K in 2012-2013 in fitting a wireless internet facility (to complement the wired system), refit all the bathrooms, upgrade the fire detection systems and improve energy efficiency with additional insulation and new double glazing.

In line with the charity's objective of providing a low cost halls of residence option, the rent level of this development will be reduced for 2012-2013 and kept on a low fixed inflator throughout the five years. An arrangement entered into by Leeds Metropolitan University will ensure this development is their lowest cost accommodation option whilst providing a decent and good quality housing option for first year students.

The Development and Leasing of Carlton Hill Phase 2 - the development of Carlton Hill phase two was put on hold after the credit crunch of 2008 and Unipol will seek to reinvigorate this second phase by offering to lease a new development, working in partnership with the University of Leeds and private investors. The development is likely to house between 350-400 students and would enable

communal social spaces and a central office, together with full out of hours security, to be extended to the whole site. It is hoped that this new project can come to fruition in the summer of 2014, subject to land being made available by the local authority. The development would concentrate on housing students in larger shared en suite flats with an emphasis on affordability and the priority the University of Leeds gives to students with disabilities will be reflected in the provision of this additional accommodation.

Bradford College - Unipol already provides many of the forward facing services for the College's accommodation operation and as part of that Unipol have been buying in 120 rooms for their students for the past three years. Unipol will explore with the College the possibility of leasing a new stock of between 100-120 bed spaces over 2013-14 linked in with the "eco" brand of the University of Bradford's existing development entitled "The Green" as part of a joint contribution to the urban regeneration of an area of Bradford.

Maintenance of the Portfolio - the portfolio will continue to receive sufficient ongoing investment both directly and from provisions previously made in the sinking funds for larger developments. The following upgrades are noted:

- all complexes and houses (with the exception of Royal Park Flats) will be fitted with three quarter or double beds by 2013-2014
- all off street properties will have RCD protection by January 2013 and all shared student complexes will have the latest RCD protection by January 1st 2015
- all of the kitchens at Carlton Hill will be refitted (with enhanced storage and fridge/freezer capacity) over 2012-2014 and the combination heating systems will be replaced with more efficient condenser boilers by January 1st 2014
- wireless internet will be installed in Grayson Heights (by the University of Leeds) and Royal Park Flats (by Unipol) across the summer of 2013 and this addition will be rolled out between 2013-2015 to both Carlton Hill and Mill Street, allowing for the fast and cost effective operation of handheld devices and laptops within those complexes. Wired internet will remain as the primary source of connectivity for academic purposes.

Family Housing - the existing stock will be maintained with a 5-10 year development proposal being submitted to the University of Leeds for the future leasing of Woodsley Terrace in August 2014.

Unipol will work with others to try to add a further 12 family units to its portfolio to meet existing demand.

Rental levels will be kept within the boundaries of affordability which can currently be defined as rent levels between £340 to £620pcm. As family tenants meet their own energy costs they will gain a direct advantage from the improvements planned in insulation, installation of new double glazing and more efficient heating systems.

2012-2013 will see the conclusion of the final phase of improving white and grey goods and furnishings throughout the portfolio and all off street properties will be recurtained over 2012-2015.

International Students - are an increasingly important part of Unipol's constituency. Many family tenants are research postgraduates who stay with the charity over several years.

Unipol will seek, in partnership with others, to develop a small number of dedicated off-street properties that will be prioritised specifically for single international students and these will be rented on line with utility and high quality internet services inclusive within the rent, offering students what has previously only been available in larger complexes with much higher rents.

Unipol will seek, in partnership with the University of Leeds and Leeds University Union, to develop an annual social programme for international postgraduate students living at Grayson Heights.

Unipol will also seek to improve information about locality, health services and schools to international students who need this information.

Managing Properties - Unipol will maintain or slightly increase its current level of housing management for shared student houses.

It will seek, if possible, to increase its housing management load in larger purpose built student developments.

In the light of changes to the student shared house market, Unipol will seek to develop management expertise in housing younger professionals who frequently occupy the same types of properties as students but who have different management and letting requirements. It is prudent for Unipol to ensure that it develops expertise in this area to prepare itself for emergent markets that will switch from student to professional lettings and back again.

Unipol will seek out a small sized portfolio that will allow it to develop a self-funding professional lettings infrastructure across 2012-2013.

The Bureau Services

New Website - a new Unipol website (affecting Leeds, Nottingham, Bradford and other affiliates) will be developed for launching in the summer of 2014.

A working party has already been established, to be informed by additional focus group input, that will explore afresh what it is that students need to know and the best methods of delivering fast functionality. The new website will need to take into account the rapid growth of handheld devices which are likely to be the source of 50% of the website traffic from in 2014-2015. The website will also need to maintain its current high level of accessibility for those with a visual handicap.

Leeds Services - will see the Bureau being refitted within late 2012 or 2013 - again following consultation with our users about the nature of the space and the establishment of more face to face advice. This will be refit for a new purpose and will see the Bureau becoming a stronger communications hub for both housing advice and as a centre for Unipol's property management operation. Unipol will seek to extend the lease with the University of Leeds for its current offices from 2017 to 2022 to enable inward investment in the building to take place.

In refitting the Bureau accessibility for students with disabilities will remain a central design requirement.

The subvention funding package, which meets 36% of the cost of the Leeds Bureau, comes up for discussion with the four Principal Members in November 2012 affecting the 2013-2017 period. It is vital that the current level of funding is maintained and that those Members give Unipol their financial support in enabling the service to move forward.

The outlet located in the University Union is still relatively new and has just moved into the second year of its operation. The unit is being used successfully to deal with drop in enquiries and raise awareness about the Unipol Code, housing standards and deposit protection. Although a significant investment, there is beginning to be clear evidence that the services are contributing to both Unipol's and the University Union's mission to give these areas of the student experience a much higher, and more important, profile. The agreement with the University Union for the outlet expires in June 2013 and every attempt will be made to renew and refresh these arrangements.

Further work needs to be undertaken with Leeds Metropolitan University and their students' union to undertake similar awareness raising within the relevant sections of their building together with the possibility of fitting computer displays and technological links that their students would find helpful and attractive. These possibilities will be explored in parallel with redefining the work in its main bureau.

Unipol recognises the differences and similarities that will continue to see services to be rolled-out in an increasingly dynamic way with our partners at Leeds Trinity University College, Leeds College of Art, Leeds College of Music, the Northern School of Contemporary Dance and Leeds City College.

Nottingham Services - the service at Nottingham continues to grow, attracting more landlords and students who use the service. The Nottingham student property market is moving rapidly into surplus which will improve and increase student choice and create a more favourable environment for the service to grow further.

Funding for the Nottingham service is secured until 2014-2015 and priority will need to be given to renewing this funding. As the service has developed there has been a productive tailoring of each aspect of the service to each partners' needs.

Family housing in Nottingham is hard to find and, when found, is expensive. Unipol will continue to explore better methods of supporting and advising students with dependents who need to live in the City.

This next three years will see Unipol exploring the options of widening the services it can provide to students. A more central office in the City will be an important precondition of this. Matters under consideration are extending the use of paper based tabloid copy to convey relevant information quickly through the student community in the City and undertaking a limited amount of property management which would offset some core costs within the service. This extension of services would reduce the future dependence of the service on funders whilst widening out Unipol's profile more generally within the City. A review will report on these matters by the end of 2012 with agreed action planned for 2013 and 2014.

Bradford Services - The close link with the College has already been mentioned. The student property market in Bradford is changing with large numbers of purpose built halls being let at low rents, reducing demand for off street properties. The service must re-orientate itself to give students more information about these larger developments and ensure that proper choice is exercised in the renting process. Unipol also needs to take a more direct policing line, in co-operation with the local authority, to identify poor quality unaccredited properties and ensure relevant enforcement action is taken to either bring them up to standard or stop students renting them.

The Unipol Codes and Accreditation

Unipol sees the ongoing operation and development of accreditation as a central part of its mission to improve, identify and badge improving standards. Unipol already runs a mixture of new, developing and mature schemes - all will see changes made to them:

- the Unipol Code in Leeds, currently covering 17,500 bed spaces, will be revised (through a consultative Code Review Group over the summer of 2012) with any changes taking effect in September 2013. As part of its commitment to keeping the Code alive, all landlords will be asked to rejoin the scheme from that date. For the first time Unipol will be seeking to make a charge for joining the Code with the aim that landlords should contribute 20% of the operational cost: not a large amount of money but an important step forward in supplementing declining funding lines from others. A similar charge agreed with members in Nottingham in summer 2012 has been successful and has deterred only a very few from rejoining
- the Unipol DASH Code in Nottingham, currently covering about 10,000 bed spaces and fully revised in 2011, will need to grow to 16,400 over the next few years and recruitment will be stepped up
- both the Leeds and Nottingham Codes are seeing greater engagement with managing agents through both full membership of the Code and the interim Code Supporter status. After three years of operating with managing agents in Leeds Unipol has learnt a lot and the most significant areas of growth of both Codes will come from this group
- in Bradford, the Unipol Code will be reviewed in 2013 but, as has been mentioned elsewhere, Unipol will also be undertaking pro-active work to identify poor quality properties (that damage the student experience) with a view to either seeing improvements made or persuading students to desert them. There is enough low cost, high quality accommodation available for students in Bradford and no one needs to rent poor quality properties
- the National Codes for larger developments, currently covering 165,000 bed spaces, goes from strength to strength. A revised and strengthened verification process is seeing problems identified and resolved more quickly. The on-line training available to members will become part of the audit and verification arrangements later in 2012. The National Codes have strong support from their members who are heavily involved through the successful Committee of Management that meets three times a year. Over the next year Unipol will explore the uses of the National Codes structure to become a more effective lobbying body for these particular providers of high quality student housing. The Codes will also give the promotion of diversity, particularly in respect of housing choices for those with disability, a high priority. It may also

be a good time to recruit more members to the Educational Establishments Code and to play a more active role in the governance of the UUK Code

- the Accommodation for Students (AfS) National Code is still in its infancy, only being launched in November 2011. This will be a five year project and over the next year both Unipol and AfS will actively promote the Code as a robust tool which highlights good quality providers using the AfS web site. A 25% penetration rate on the web site by 2014 would be a benchmark of success
- in all cases, verification and visits to properties to look at standards, to talk to tenants and to engage with providers, will increase. Over 2011-2012 Unipol has trained a team, both nationally and locally, of skilled and professional verifiers who can be used to check with knowledge and authority, on student housing providers near them. This network will grow in importance across the period of this report.

There is a tendency within the world of accreditation to see many schemes reducing their standards and verification to training only schemes or where on-line processes are used to award accreditation status. Some of these changes are in response to diminishing resources being made available for the running and verification of those schemes.

Unipol, and the institutions who support us, take the view that students and their parents *expect* that accredited properties are checked from time to time by verifiers to ensure high quality physical and management standards. Anything carrying the Unipol badge carries with it the organisation's belief that the provider is professional, honest and efficient. If there are problems then there is a fully transparent and active Complaints and Tribunal system to ensure accountable fair play and accountability.

So long as Unipol can find the resources to run the Unipol Codes in this robust way, it will avoid the watering down of both standards and inevitably confidence, from our students and their parents.

IT and Communications

After a period of under-investment from 2008 to 2010, both are vital for Unipol to be successful and Unipol will invest more in IT and communications than it has ever done before to ensure that the organisation has good robust software and the IT infrastructure fitted to an efficient organisation.

Unipol has already committed to invest £85K in 2011-2012 and a further £65K in 2012-2103 in IT development, plus the cost of the new website (estimated at £120K). The further development of an in house IT team (coupled with efficient outsourcing of certain project work estimated at £35K a year) will be expanded by the addition of a full time Applications Developer from June 2012, bringing the IT team to 4 full time staff and two part time staff.

This represented a major and continuing investment in Unipol's IT services and infrastructure and includes:

- the development of a new server room with enhanced server capacity (2012)
- the delivery of phase 2 of the housing management system (2013)

- the refitting of computer terminals in the public and housing management areas of the Nottingham and Leeds buildings (2013)
- the upgrading of Unipol's systems to Windows 7 and Office (2012).

In communications:

- a new telephone system is being installed in Leeds in 2012
- design and production of paper based copy is being centralised in Leeds with the possibility of an in house designer
- the shared services agenda will see core copy and core designs being developed for all Unipol publications to reduce production costs
- additional flat screens and display boards will be rolled at key locations.

Other IT outputs are referred to throughout this report.

Finance

On going high quality financial management of Unipol is an essential part of its success and operationally it must be able to respond to the needs of growth. Some change is possible building on the advantage gained from the recent added capacity brought about by the appointment of a new Senior Finance Officer. This added capacity will be felt by:

- generating efficiencies by reviewing and tightening energy billing procedures and information to tenants
- improving rent collection following a review in 2012 resulting in the establishment of specialist collection routines for nominated tenants, returning student tenants and family tenants together with a shift from the use of standing orders to direct debits that will commence in January 2013
- maintaining a tight planning and operational regime to ensure the organisation can fund the significant investment programme that is being undertaken without becoming over-stretched.

Tenancy Support and Social Networking

Unipol has worked hard to establish a high level of tenancy support and this support will be maintained and protected. A recent review into welcoming will result in changes being made by September 2013 to various welcoming meals and to an enhancement of social networking and twitter feeds to facilitate greater interaction between new tenants.

Conferences and Training

Training is an important function within the organisation. Not only does it maintain the public profile of the charity and its work, but it feeds the mission to promote best practice and it also keeps Unipol up to date with developments throughout the sector.

After a decline in training activity in 2010-2011 training output is increasing again in 2011-2012. After a period of eight year's stability a new sponsor is needed for 2012-2013. More training events will be

undertaken in partnership with others and more innovative events will deal with policy and development which will be added to the regular training provided for staff working in the sector.

Unipol consistently obtains good feedback from its delegates and the challenge is to contain costs without affecting the quality and content of events. The in-house use of Unipol's Board room for training has helped the programme enormously and the space still has further room for development and use.

The Community

Unipol will maintain its links with community groups and community initiatives wherever it works. It will play a full part in discussing the relevance and use of powers obtained in both Leeds and Nottingham under Article 4 and will seek to ensure that informed debate takes place on the need for HMOs as a form of affordable housing (not just for students). Unipol has commissioned research from an agency re'new which, with the cooperation of the universities in Leeds, is revisiting the data available to examine what has been happening as student numbers in Headingley, Hyde Park and Woodhouse have contracted and what effect the larger purpose built buildings have had on student demand for HMOs. The research, reporting in the first half of 2012 will also examine the affordability of released HMO stock for other rental groups and any possible return to owner occupation.

As part of its wider role in promoting the safety of students within their homes, Unipol will work appropriately with Safer Leeds, the Crime Reduction Partnership, the Knowledge Campaign and within the Unipol Code to make students and landlords aware of the importance of good security and security awareness.

Unipol, in expanding, improving and maintaining its property portfolio, expends around £1 million annually on works and goods. Although it is vital that the organisation receives best value for money in procuring these, Unipol will establish a policy stressing the importance of using local traders and workers as part of delivering a value based and sustainable procurement process.

Unipol is also co-operating with the National Union of Students to undertake a revamped Accommodation Costs Survey in the summer of 2012 and will report on its findings in November 2012 at an appropriate event. The survey will provide data on how student housing costs have shifted over the last two years and will look at any new developments in the structure of the HEI rental market.

Unipol has a partnership with the United Kingdom Council for International Affairs (UKCISA) and will continue to work with them on updating information provided to international students about how to rent appropriate housing here in the UK.

Governance and the Board

The charity will continue to be overseen by a Board of Directors (who are also the trustees of the charity) 13 of whom are nominated by the five member institutions (the University of Leeds, Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds Metropolitan University Students' Union, Leeds University Union and Bradford College).

The Board can co-opt up to 5 further trustees and currently there is one co-opted trustee. Over the summer of 2011 the Board, following the recommendations of the Group on Governance, approved a

framework for recruiting up to four additional co-opted trustees to the Board. The Board also approved a framework, based on a skills analysis of Board needs together with diversity criteria, for this recruitment to commence in 2012. By June 2012, any new trustees appointed through the recruitment process should join the Board for the first time.

The Board's overall role in accountability and governance of the charity is assisted by a number of committees and from time to time the Board will establish specific working groups or project groups to consider more detailed policy options open to them.

The Board will maintain its commitment to the *Good Governance Code for the Voluntary and Community Sector*.

The Board have also revisited the trustee review system and concluded that a viable review system was an essential part of the Board's operation and responsibilities and a review system, undertaken by peer review, is taking place across 2012.

The Board have decided that from 2012 they should meet annually to review the *Forward Look* and the strategic progression of the charity together with a special Board meeting to discuss and approve this document.

Conclusion

The next three years will highlight the importance of financial achievement and service improvement as important outputs from the charity. This report highlights the importance of delivering on inward investment within the economic restraints that are affecting all organisations.

The charity is well positioned to be able to deliver incrementally improving services as part of its mission to help students through their education, offering them support, a choice of a not for profit housing supplier and contributing towards an enhanced student experience.

The values of the charity: honesty, transparency, choice, improvement and accountability, have never been more important in its wider mission to improve student accommodation standards and management at a time when there is pressure on rents and where high cost fees will result in many students and parents having to evaluate what they need and what they can afford.

This *Forward Look* has not dwelt on the threats to the charity, although the Board carry out a regular assessment of risk. Instead this report outlines an ambitious agenda for change, adaptation and improvement whilst maintaining growth as the best method of furthering Unipol's services.

This report outlines a clear sense of overarching and detailed priorities, based on a deeper understanding of the significance and potential of the charity's mission. Its intent is to attract, even demand, the support of those who make this work possible.