

BOARD MEMBER INFORMATION PACK

June 2019

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Dear Applicant,

Thank you for expressing an interest in becoming a Board member of United Communities.

United Communities is a dynamic community based housing association, managing approximately 2,000 homes in the wider Bristol area.

The vast majority of our homes are for general social housing residents but we also provide some specialist homes for vulnerable people who may need more support and a sheltered housing scheme in central Bristol. In addition, we have about 150 shared ownership properties. In 2017 we agreed an ambitious development programme to build 500 new homes by 2021. We are well on the way to achieving this with a varied pipeline including several innovative community led schemes. We have also just established a new repairs partnership with another locally based Housing Association.

Our Board has a good range of skills and we are particularly looking to recruit two new Board Members with the following experience:

* social housing rental / management experience.
* consumer facing experience
* asset management

Additionally we want to build the diversity of the Board and we warmly welcome applicants that reflect the communities where we work.

At United Communities we are committed to delivering **More Than Just a Roof** for all our customers.  This means going the extra mile and striving to have a positive impact on all our residents’ lives by providing good quality homes, a great service and vibrant communities.

Yours sincerely

Andy Willis

Chair of the Board

Introduction

This information pack is designed to give a brief insight into the work of United Communities for prospective board members. If you are recruited to the Board, full induction training will be given. The areas covered in this pack will therefore be properly explained in the context of the role, during your introductory months.

Our mission, vision and values

Our purpose

Alongside our partners we will work tirelessly to meet the need for affordable homes in a way which will help to regenerate our core communities and work with our residents, to provide More Than Just A Roof.

Our priorities

* Develop an additional 500 homes over the next 5 years, of which at least 70% will be affordable and within our target communities.
* Sustain at least 75% of our existing homes as rented and affordable.
* Develop and manage all types of housing and property if this helps us to achieve our purpose.
* Proactively make the best use of all our properties to maximise the provision of new homes.
* Be efficient in everything we do, so that we can dedicate up to 20% of our surplus to provide residents with More Than Just a Roof.
* Focus our More Than commitment on outcomes in our communities which make full use of resident’s skills and aspirations.
* Listen to our staff and residents so that they feel valued and have an effective voice in the strategic decisions we make and can co-design our services.

Insert Our Values here … More Than.

**Are we a Charity or Company?**

We are a Community Benefit Society registered with charitable rules. This means that we are regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority rather than Companies House or the Charity Commission.

Our History

United Communities was established on 1st April 2013 when two Bristol-based housing associations, Bristol Community Housing Foundation (BCHF) and United Housing Association (UHA), began working together in partnership. We legally merged in 2017.

BCHF celebrated its 10th birthday in 2012. Within the first ten years BCHF successfully completed over 450 homes as part the major regeneration project of Upper Horfield as well as other housing projects across Bristol.

United HA was formed in 1986 with the prime objective of advocating and providing good quality, affordable housing and related services for the black and minority ethnic (BME) community in Bristol. It was set up because the needs of the BME community were not being met satisfactorily by the local authority or existing housing associations.

Please look at our website – <http://www.unitedcommunities.org.uk> to find out all about us and our aims.

**How is the Board organised?**

The primary purpose of the organisation is to provide social housing - often referred to as affordable housing - which can be for rent or sale. The maximum level of rent that can be charged by housing associations is set by the Government. Rents are set at levels that allow people with fewer choices in the housing market to afford them.

The Board currently has 9 members. The maximum number of consecutive terms that a Board member can be on the Board is three, limiting service to nine years before a break must be taken. The Board sees this as very much a maximum term, and directors should expect to serve between three and six years in normal circumstances.

The Board meets at least six times a year, with meetings lasting 2-3 hours. There are also up to three annual away days for Board members and occasional PR events and other meetings to attend.

**What is the role of the Board?**

The purpose of the Board is to direct and control United Communities’s affairs. The Board sets United Communities’s overall aims and objectives and ensures that the organisation is meeting them and complying with legal requirements promoting the lasting interests of the organisation.

The Board does not run the organisation on a day to day basis as it has paid professional staff to do this. The Chief Executive is responsible for the operational management of United Communities’s affairs. The Board delegates full operational powers to the Chief Executive to act and authorise decisions on its behalf.

The Board’s key functions are to:

1. Define and ensure compliance with the values and objectives of United Communities
2. Establish policies and plans to achieve those objectives.
3. Approve each year the Budget, Financial Statements and Annual Report, before publication.
4. Establish and oversee a framework of delegation and systems of control.
5. Agree policies and make decisions on all matters that might create significant financial or other risk to United Communities or which raise material issues of principle.
6. Monitor United Communities performance in relation to the plans, budgets, controls and decisions.
7. Appoint (and if necessary dismiss) the Chief Executive and be represented in the appointment of key second tier managers.
8. Satisfy itself that our affairs are conducted lawfully and in accordance with generally accepted standards of performance and propriety.
9. Ensure compliance with statutory and regulatory obligations, including equal opportunities.

**Do Board Members receive payment?**

The Board has agreed that all Board members will be entitled to claim £1885 per annum for their role. All Board members can claim travel, childcare and other expenses properly incurred by them in connection with their attendance at United Communities meetings. There are specific procedures and claim forms covering this, which will be made available.

**Do Board members receive training and induction?**

All new members will be provided with an induction pack including United Communities’s major policies, Business Plan, Annual Report etc and will be invited to meet the Company Secretary and Chief Executive for an induction. This will include a review of the first papers and principal issues for the next Board meeting. There is also an annual training programme for Board members. Board members will also be invited to ‘shadow’ United Communities staff and ‘buddy’ with an existing Board member to learn more about the organisation.

**How frequently should I attend Board meetings?**

Board members must be committed to attend at least 75% of all Board meetings (including strategy sessions) in a year. Given the limited number of meetings the Chair hopes that directors will exceed this minimum requirement. The agenda will be sent to you at least five days in advance of the meeting, electronically, and it is expected that you will have read all the reports in advance of the meeting.

The Board delegates some decision making to the Audit and Risk and Governance and Remuneration committees.

**How does the Board operate?**

United Communities is governed by Rules setting out its purpose and how it operates. It must also adhere to legislation and the requirements of its regulator, the Regulator of Social Housing.

We also have a framework of internal best practice policies and procedures. In common with much of the not-for-profit sector, Board members are expected to operate to the highest standards of probity, and this means that they cannot obtain personal or family gain from their Board position. Processes are in place to inform board members of their particular duties in this respect.

**Will I be personally liable?**

All United Communities’s Board members are required to be shareholders, and their liability as a shareholder is limited to the value of the £1 share purchased.

However, a Board member’s potential liability is greater because the Board is ultimately responsible for the acts of the organisation. This should be taken seriously but the risk should not be exaggerated – there is no known case where an individual board member of a housing association has been made personally liable.

Also remember that the Board is supported in carrying out its responsibilities by the Chief Executive and other members of staff, and insurance cover is in place to protect Board members against personal liability for matters arising from their role as Board members.

For further information please look at our website:

[www.unitedcommunities.org.uk](http://www.unitedcommunities.org.uk)

Details of the current board members:

<http://www.unitedcommunities.org.uk/about-us/board/>

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| **Role profile – Board Member**  |
| **Purpose of role** |
| The Board is collectively responsible for the direction and control of United Communities and each individual Board member must carry out their duties and responsibilities inaccordance with the constitution, the law and regulatory requirements. |
| **Core tasks and responsibilities**  |
| As a minimum, we ask that all Board members have the willingness and ability to:* devote sufficient time to Board work, including preparing for and attending meetings, training sessions and other events as required
* consider and understand documents, tables and statistics
* challenge and ask questions
* work as part of a group
* listen to and respect the contribution of others and contribute to group discussion
* be flexible and support collective decisions
* uphold the vision, values and objectives of United Communities
* act professionally, with integrity and in the best interests of United Communities
* maintain confidentiality
* adhere to the principles and practice of equality and diversity
* commit to involving and consulting residents and stakeholders
* adhere to the NHF Code of Governance and NHF Code of Conduct.
* be able to respect boundaries between executive (staff or day to day) and governance functions.

It also helps to have an interest in social housing and the motivation to make a difference. Board member responsibilities include:* leading change and continuous improvement
* defining and ensuring compliance with the vision, values and objectives
* establishing strategies, policies and plans to achieve the vision, values and objectives
* approving each year’s budget and accounts
* establishing and overseeing an appropriate framework of delegation and control
* making decisions that might create significant financial or other risk to United Communities or which raise material issues of principle
* monitoring United Communities performance in relation to plans, budgets and decisions
* To read and digest reports prepared by staff and advisors and contribute to appropriate debate of key issues amongst Board members to ensure decisions are well founded.
* appointing the Chief Executive
* attending induction and at least 75% of meetings and training events and at least one Annual Away Day, the AGM and informal meetings and other events during the year.
* joining at least one committee which support the Board
* participating in activities that will develop skills and knowledge (such as training and appraisal)
* acting as ambassadors for United Communities and not taking part or being involved in activities which may bring United Communities into disrepute
* acting with the same skill and care as any prudent person managing their own personal business affairs
* To ensure key principles of diversity, inclusion, involvement and empowerment are evident in decision making

**Board member skills, experience and understanding**In order to govern properly, the Board as a whole must have a diverse range of skills, competencies, experience and knowledge. Each Board member is expected to contribute to at least one of these qualities:* leadership and working as a team
* direct knowledge of the needs and aspirations of the communities and people United Communities serves
* general business, financial and management skills
* knowledge of the external framework including financial markets, political imperatives and operating environment of social housing
* other relevant and specialist skills, such as commercial, financial, investment, risk management, legal, health, social services, property management and housing development
* effective communication skills and an ability to focus on key issues facing the organisation
* the ability to foster a culture that enhances commitment, enthusiasm and excellent performance from staff

**Other guidance*** All Board members share the same legal status and have equal responsibility for decisions taken that affect the success of United Communities.
* Each Board member must act only in the interests of United Communities and not on behalf of any constituency or interest group.
* No one who serves as a Board member should be in a position to gain or benefit from their dealings with United Communities.
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