



HullSTARS Advisory Committee Meeting

14th July 2015 – 1pm

Meeting Room 5, University House

Attending:

Toni Proctor (HullSTARS); Ashleigh Davies (Vice President for Welfare and Community); Gina Rayment (Advice Centre Manager); Ian Sanders (Hull City Council); Jill Cooper (University Accommodation Manager); Debbie Drake (Humber Landlord Association); Christine Kirk (Hull Student Landlord Association); Hannah Crookes (University of Hull – Students as Citizens); Kate Showan (Hull City Council Waste Management).

Non-committee members:

Avenue Lets; Universal Student Living (x2); Sarah Bethall; Andrew Alphonsus; John Constable; HUU Homes (x2); Steve Welburn; Andrew Fletcher; Susan Steel.

1. Apologies

Ashleigh Davies – Attending graduation ceremonies.

Gina Rayment – To arrive at 2.15pm.

2. Conditionals of Attendance

TP recapped on the conditions of attendance sent out to attendees in advance of the meeting.

3. Students as Citizens

Hannah Crookes gave a brief presentation in relation to the Students as Citizens project which aims to further integrate students in to the community as part of the community strategy creation, working in partnership with HUU.

Hannah discussed how landlords could help with the project by starting a dialogue with the project staff. Input would include:

- How do you feel students contribute to the community positively?
- Have you had any negative experiences involving students?
- What do you think our students can do to interact and support the community more?

Hannah left some information for landlords to take away; TP now has copies should anyone want them.

Contacts:

Ashleigh Davies (VP Welfare and Community) Ashleigh.Davies@hull.ac.uk 466259

Hannah Crookes (Communications Officer) H.Crookes@hull.ac.uk 466837

4. Re-brand

TP discussed the planned improvements and rebrand to HullSTARS using a mood board as a visual aid, primarily the website. Discussion was had that the rebranding would primarily be aesthetic, making the information clearer, better laid out and more vibrant to look at. TP added that a promotional video will be embedded on the homepage to explain what HullSTARS does.

The rebranded website would be re-launched with the review week in October.

TP confirmed that the back end site would not be changing, although the landlord's FAQ page would be cleaned up to improve usability. CK asked whether there could be a fact sheet online to support landlords, offering advice on where to turn if there are any issues with tenants etc. TP confirmed that there will be an 'information for landlords' section and that this information could be included. TP discussed that there may be underlying factors for a tenant not paying rent, perhaps mental health issues or other financial problems and advised that the HUU Advice Centre may be able to assist students. Landlords could let their tenants know about these services. CK asked if landlords can use the Advice Centre, TP confirmed that the Advice Centre protects students, and therefore would not assist landlords.

Action: TP to look at landlord fact sheet.

DD asked about what exactly was changing in the rebrand. TP confirmed that the colour scheme and content would be changing. There would also be a promotional video and banners added, with the search facilities becoming clearer.

CK asked about the 'report' function on HullSTARS, TP confirmed that as a paid up landlord, should they wish to report a review or photograph, they can simply click on the 'report' button next to the review or photograph and this would remove the item from the website pending an investigation.

5. Hull City Council – Waste Management

KS talked about students' use of bins and how landlords could help to ensure they were being used appropriately. The aim is to keep it simple. Landlords were asked to ensure that all three bins were in place for September and labelled with both house number and street name. KS noted that the information packs are now sent out in September and asked landlords to check that the information is displayed within the property, if they haven't got a pack to call 01482 300300, or email wastemanagement@hull.ac.uk. Information can be found online at www.hullcc.gov.uk/waste

It was discussed that landlords could ask students to put the bin collection information in their phone calendars and that providing adequately sized general waste and recycling bins in the kitchens would be helpful.





Discussion was had surrounding Hull City Council's offer for free second hand bins for HullSTARS members, KS advised landlords to contact the waste management team directly for this. Discussion was had regarding bins being overfilled and not collected, missed collections, 'bin dippers', passers by on Newland Avenue areas putting incorrect waste in bins when passing. KS confirmed that she does not deal with enforcement, it was agreed that these issues were irrelevant given that the responsible parties were not present.

TP confirmed that should Hull City Council's Waste Management wish to have a follow up meeting with landlords, this could be facilitated through HUU/HullSTARS.

Action: TP to put links to the waste management websites on both the tenants and landlords pages of HullSTARS when re-launched.

6. Criteria Changes

TP confirmed minimal changes for 2015/16.

Landlords will be given extra points for attending Hull City Council's training course on the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. DD asked if the course the HLA attend would be sufficient. TP agreed that providing the content is approved by HullSTARS/Ian Sanders, and the landlords can provide proof of their attendance to the course this would suffice.

Discussion was had in relation to measurements and whether we should change the wording for items such as baths/showers/sinks to ask for 'full size' rather than giving set measurements. It was then argued that there would then be room for interpretation. IS gave the background to why the measurements were implemented, and noted that there are flaws with measurements, as they don't measure the area or cubic capacity of the items. It was then discussed that increasing the tolerance might be sufficient.

It was agreed that these items would be finalised at the follow up meeting to be held for panel members in August.

Action: TP to include these points in the agenda for the next meeting.

TP confirmed that the question in relation to the distance between the locking mechanism and letterbox will have a N/A option, providing the letterbox is fitted with a deflector or cage.

All criteria changes are based on landlords' feedback, TP thanked landlords for completing surveys and giving their input.

7. Benefits

StuRents

TP advised that one of the things landlords like most about HullSTARS is the additional scoring with StuRents. StuRents are now appearing on page 1 of Google rankings when searching for student accommodation in Hull.

DD questions the phone call facility when there is a missed call and no number is available to call back. TP said this was not something she was aware of and would enquire with Michael Rainsford of StuRents and add to the landlords FAQ's.

Action: TP to contact Michael regarding missed calls.

The scoring system on StuRents was discussed, and that properties registered to HullSTARS receive an additional scoring and additional points based on their HullSTARS rating.

Right to reply/report

This will remain reserved for HullSTARS registered landlords.

Advertising through hullstars.co.uk

TP advised that the HullSTARS website was not be utilised as much as it could be, suggesting that landlords are missing a trick. Landlords can add property information and photographs to HullSTARS landlords have an additional platform to advertise and show off their property.

DD mentioned that students don't know the street names. TP said that this is something we can perhaps look into.

Action: TP to liaise with senior managers to get their thoughts.

CK asked how many hits the website gets, TP noted that the figured hadn't been checked recently but could be added to the minutes.

Rachelle of Universal Student Living noted that they have had 500 hits directed from HullSTARS.co.uk since September.

POST MEETING ADDITION:

From September 2014-19th July 2015

8,461 users

11,479 sessions

73.2% new visitors

50.95% hits from UK, with hits from Russia, USA, Brazil, China, Germany, France, Italy and Japan.





Discounts with Hull City Council

It was confirmed that at present, Hull City Council would continue to offer free replacement black bins (*where available), discounts on HMO licensing, pest control and drainage.

CK asked if the relevant departments know about these discounts. IS confirmed that they had a list of registered properties and that the information was up to date on the Hull City Council website.

Detailed feedback and reports

TP confirmed that the criteria and weightings would now be published for all landlords to see in advance of signing up (*criteria to be agreed at next meeting). Feedback going forward would include the report and information on how to improve your star rating.

HUU Events

HullSTARS landlords will be able to attend HUU events subject to the VP Welfare and Community.

HullSTARS Awards

Submissions now open. Criteria has changed slightly so please read information before applying.

Winners will be announced at 12pm at the Housing Fair.

Winners will receive certification, a banner for their stall at the housing fair, and details of the winners will be sent out via email to all students, as well as being posted on HullSTARS.co.uk and hullstudents.com.

Submissions close 9am, 27th September 2015.

8. Pricing

Pricing for 2015/16 will remain the same. £45 per 1-5 bedroom property with a £2.50 additional fee for any bedrooms over the 5. For larger developments, a 'property' is based per kitchen space and will include 5 bedrooms in the price per kitchen.

For example, a 20-bedroom property with 4 kitchens will be charged 4 x £45 and includes 20 bedrooms. A 21 bedroom property with 4 kitchens will be charged at 4 x £45 + £2.50 for the additional room.

Discount will be offered to properties over 100 bedrooms.

As HUU makes a loss on each property they inspect, the discount for 5* properties will no longer be available.

Biennial subscriptions will still be available by paying for two years upfront, then having one inspection to cover the two years. Biennial subscriptions can be chosen at any point during the academic year, however the first year must be paid within the subscription timescales.

Subscriptions will be open from 1st August – 30th October 2015.

9. Housing Fair

The Housing Fair will take place on Tuesday, 1st December 2015 and is open to HullSTARS landlords only. Landlords must sign up their properties before 30th October without exception, and would need to sign up a minimum of 50% of their properties to HullSTARS to be able to attend.

It was discussed that there is no way of knowing for certain exactly how many properties a landlord/agent has, TP noted that they have a rough idea how many properties each landlord has, and that should be sufficient.

Terms and conditions are to be agreed with the Vice President for Welfare and Community, Ashleigh Davies, but a few terms were mentioned. These include:

- 50% of properties signed up to HullSTARS before 30th October 2015.
- New landlords must have a portion of their properties inspected before the fair.
- Stall payments MUST be paid before 30th October 2015 without exception.
- Stalls will be charged, Ashleigh to confirm pricing.
- Failure to have ALL registered properties inspected during the academic year will result in banning from future events for a period.

Discussion was had about holding the fair on a Tuesday and that the union building is busiest on a Tuesday. It was discussed that Wednesday was not an option given that it would mean that those playing sports would not be able to attend, and also that many students plan their part time work around their availability on Wednesday afternoons.

The location was discussed and that Asylum was currently being considered along with external venues, it was also noted that by hiring an external venue the money left for marketing would be reduced.

Ashleigh Davies would like to hold a meeting with landlords to discuss the Housing Fair specifically and would like the opportunity to gain landlords feedback face-to-face. If anyone would like to attend this meeting, please email Ashleigh.Davies@hull.ac.uk to register your interest. The date and the time will be confirmed in communication with Ashleigh.

10. Q&A

- Could StuRents include a map of Hull centred on the university?





It was agreed that this could be looked into.

Action: TP to discuss with Michael Rainsford.

- Can students search by rating?
At present no, it is something that can be discussed with StuRents and for the HullSTARS website.
Action: TP to discuss with senior management and StuRents.
- Can you put a map on the HullSTARS homepage?
It was discussed with those in attendance that maps aren't very effective and can be very costly to implement a good one. It was discussed that HullSTARS could include a PDF download of the 'student areas' on the tenants' section of HullSTARS, and that currently each property page has a map with walking distance to the university.
Action: TP to source map.
- Do we know what the student numbers will look like next year? Will the removal of the cap on student number affect landlords?
The university said that they had 400 rooms left to let and were expecting approximately 800 more students through clearing.

A brief discussion was had as to universities new halls of residence and its impact on landlords. JC confirmed at Needler Hall was closing and therefore losing 360 beds. JC mentioned the demand for en-suites, on-campus accommodation and that the university wanted to meet the demand. Prices for the accommodation will be £120-£140 per week compared with £87 at Taylor Court. JC confirmed that the halls would be available for all years.

Briefly it was discussed that the university would be opening the Health Hub, but this currently does not mean any additional courses will be on offer.

- Can the system be changed to allow landlords to conduct their own audits? These could be done over the summer when landlords have time. The majority of the audit is unchangeable, i.e. measurements.

TP explained that there are no plans to change, and we are too late in the year to look into this for this coming year of auditing. TP discussed the 3-day training course done with Property Auditors; the on-going training through accompanied visits and social media groups. TP explained that there are several benefits of having the students present at the time of the inspection; one of these points is the information that students give us at the time of inspection.

TP explained that making such a dramatic change to the structure of HullSTARS is not something that can be changed overnight and would need to be approved by the Board of Trustees, who had previously agreed the business plan in its current format.

IS discussed the Housing Health and Safety Rating System training Hull City Council provide to Property Auditors, and the re-inspections he has carried out this year. Discussion was had around the minor issues raised by the re-inspections, safety glass and thermostatic valves to radiators being the only two covered by the audit. IS talked about the need for safety catches on escape windows.

Action: TP to raise this with a member of HUU's senior management team.

A brief conversation was had surrounding overpopulation of rental houses in the area, IS asked anyone with any knowledge of this to report it to the council for investigation.

- Will the Housing Health and Safety Rating System training help landlords to understand the risks?
IS talked about the one day training course offered by the council and that the dates of courses were available on the council's website.
- Has the course been a requirement before?
IS mentioned that in the days of The Scheme it was decided not to make it compulsory. As Hull City Council went 'accredit' student landlords while HullSTARS is in operation, it was decided to add the course to the criteria.
- Why has there been a shift from benefitting landlords to now being all for the students?
TP discussed that the university ran The Scheme, Hull University Union (HUU) runs HullSTARS. As a student union, the priority is to support our members first and foremost.

It was discussed that nationally there have been a large number of student housing review websites set up, which don't afford landlords the same benefits as HullSTARS does. Student Crown, Housing Hand and Move'm offer websites for students to leave reviews nationally, without any dialogue with landlords at all. As HullSTARS, TP suggested that she has tried to build relationships with landlords to 'even the playing field', although students will always be a priority. TP mentioned that when HullSTARS was set up there was nothing for advertising, any Awards or benefits for being registered with HullSTARS in relation to the housing fair. These are all things that have been developed as tools to assist landlords.

- Why is there a member of the Accommodation Office on the Advisory panel when they refuse to register all of their houses?
Conversation was had in relation to the universities involvement with The Scheme and funding. It was also pointed out that the panel shares equal representatives from the perspectives of students and landlords, with Hull City Council sitting impartially.





JC expressed that given the 50% sign up for landlords to be able to attend the housing fair, it was unclear as to whether the university will sign up for 2015/16.

- Why is the union getting involved? The university should run it.
It was agreed that we are where we are, and that The Scheme closed, and the union decided to start HullSTARS, this was not a decision for the university to make.

It was noted by an attendee that there are several university run schemes nationally which are much less lenient and co-operative towards landlords, and praising HullSTARS said that her experience was that union's are better placed than universities in most cases.

- Do we have any figures on complaints about housing?
GR stated that at present we have no figures for the year, and that we should have a new facility for recording complaints by September.

Marketing was briefly discussed and landlords expressed that they would expect more than just an email to be sent to students. TP confirmed that HullSTARS planned a number of review weeks throughout the year, and on the back of the success from previous events expected good results.

The effectiveness of VP Welfare and Communities housing campaigns was questioned, with GC confirming a decrease in the number of housing complaints, but an increase in the number of housemate related issues.

A brief discussion was had to notify landlords that students could now advertise a room in their shared house in the event that someone drops. Details of this can be found at <http://hullstudent.com/living-in-hull/find-a-housemate>

- **Next meeting**
Wednesday, 12th August – 1pm, venue TBC.