



HullSTARS Advisory Committee Meeting

11th November 2015 – 9.30am

Meeting Room 2, University House

Attending:

Toni Proctor (HullSTARS); Gina Rayment (Advice Centre Manager); Ian Sanders (Hull City Council); Jill Cooper (JC) (University Accommodation Manager); Debbie Drake (Humber Landlord Association); John Constable (JC – HSLA) (Hull Student Landlord Association); Hannah Crookes (University of Hull – Students as Citizens); Michael Rainsford (StuRents).

1. Apologies

Ashleigh Davies – Attending Senate.

2. Facts and Figures

TP discussed facts and figures for HullSTARS so far this year.

- 23 landlords booked for Housing Fair in December – 26 last year.
- 37 landlords signed up for 2015/16 – 45 last year.
- 265 properties signed up – 180 last year.
- 1455 bed spaces – 1033 last year.
- Agents signed up include Head Leasing, HUU Homes, Kexgill, Unicom, Loc8me, and Avenue Lets.

Questions were asked about why the number of landlords has dropped. TP understands that it is primarily smaller landlords who have dropped off, most of whom are now having their properties managed, thus falling under the agent. TP confirmed that this was also the reason for a decrease in landlords attending the Housing Fair in December.

- Review week took 607 reviews from 11am-2pm, Monday-Friday in the week leading up to Halloween. TP confirmed that despite labelling the week #HousingHorrorStories the Promotional Staff were not solely asking for negative

reviews. The majority of the reviews were balanced, some positives and some negatives; and overall there were more positive reviews than negative, which HUU is very happy about.

- *POST MEETING:* Since review week, the approximated 65% of our website users are new visitors.

3. New HullSTARS website

TP showed the group the new look website and explained that the aim behind it was to make it more engaging and aesthetically pleasing. TP showed the group the new video which is displayed at the bottom of the homepage and describes how HullSTARS works, and again re-enforces the message that there are more houses than students, therefore encouraging students to take their time when choosing a house.

JC commented on an issue he has experienced, whereby uploading a new cover photo has resulted in his property disappearing from the HullSTARS website. TP explained that this is because properties that have been edited go into moderation once edited.

TP confirmed that she will look into whether or not the system could be edited to only put the photograph into moderation rather than the full property page, and in the meantime would look to make all landlords aware that this is what happened. Ordinarily, items are moderated within 24 hours, however it was acknowledged that over a weekend period, this would be considerably longer, and at present landlords are not aware that this is the case.

ACTION: TP to investigate with web developer to see whether it would be cost effective, in the meantime, the current situation will be highlighted in the landlords' newsletter.

4. The Lawns Roadshow

GR talked about members of staff from the Advice Centre and Vice President for Welfare and Community (VPWC) attending the Lawns to talk to students about the #huunorush campaign, encouraging students not to rush into finding a house too early. GR noted that the event was successful, and far less students were looking at this point than had been the previous year.

TP mentioned that this could be to do with the #huunorush message being available in all university owned properties and on their online system.





Issues became apparent at the Lawns that students were being contacted by 'Student Accommodation Union' who claimed to have met students at the Fresher's fair and got their details. Student Accommodation Union had text students inviting them to look for housing and signing off with 'Remember the best houses go first'.

The VPWC took to social media and our online portals to confirm that the Union had played no part in texting students; no accommodation providers are not permitted to attend the Freshers fair, and would not encourage students to meeting landlords at a pub to arrange viewings. VPWC called the number from the text messages and issued a statement online for all students.

It was discussed that HUU have their suspicions on who the responsible parties may be, however have had not confirmation as yet. The online campaign seems to have stopped students panicking and arranging viewings with this unknown third party agent.

5. Housing Fair

TP confirmed that the conditions for the event had now been sent out, and that landlords attending had been offered information regarding the event and what to expect on the day.

Discussion was had around the 50% figure and why this was chosen. TP confirmed that the decision had been taken in part as a result of landlord feedback from the previous fair. The system is believed to be fairer, and by encouraging landlords to sign up 50% of their properties in order to attend the Housing Fair, this will in turn allow HullSTARS to affect more of the student housing market.

TP confirmed that landlords are able to sign up as many properties to HullSTARS as they'd like, the 50% only related to the Housing Fair.

JC mentioned that at last years fair, some landlords had been using the University of Hull's logo without expressed permission. This year, the university's solicitor may be present to check for this, and the university is looking into the use of their logo without permission across the board.

6. Changes to biennial payments

TP reminded the group that biennial payments had changed from last year. The new system allows landlords to choose to opt in for a biennial payment at any point in the academic year, therefore if they are happy with their scoring but initially paid for an annual subscription, they can choose to pay for a biennial at any time between now and the end of the academic year.

7. StuRents

MR talked about the new look to StuRents and how HullSTARS is more prominent in the Hull searches now. Each property have a HullSTARS yellow banner to identify

which properties are registered, as well as the HullSTARS only filter on the searches. When clicking on the property details, at the bottom of each page, the HullSTARS rating is displayed, along with any student feedback once clicked.

MR notes that at present, this feature isn't the most prominent as there is recognition that not all landlords will want to have their reviews front and centre. He added that if there is demand for it to be more prominent, StuRents may be able to revisit it going forward.

MR reported that at the moment they have 1200 student properties listed on StuRents in Hull, and that they are starting to see a trickle of enquiries in Hull. StuRents is lead by the market and will not drive it. Once the market picks up, StuRents will be looking to increase their marketing. MR mentioned that Hull isn't the first city to go with regards to lettings, however it is in the top 5.

StuRents also welcome any feedback directly, and don't necessarily need feedback to go through HullSTARS. MR discussed how StuRents do their web developments in house, and therefore if there is anything landlords feel would improve the StuRents website, they can contact Michael or a member of the team directly.

8. Students As Citizens

HC discussed that the university's Community Strategy, and how TP is involved in the working group, along with relevant university staff, TP's manager, and VPWC. TP and HullSTARS will be responsible for 2/12 of the aims outlined in the Community Strategy; to educate students regarding the availability of good quality accommodation and their rights and responsibilities as tenants; and to increase sustainable waste management amongst student properties.

HC noted that TP will be chairing Waste Managements with Hull City Council, landlords and the university to get information out to students and the community. This will increase the promotion of HullSTARS by communications and engagement.

HC will be leaving the university w/c 16th November and has passed on the work that she has been doing to Anji Gardiner and Jeni Day from the University of Hull.

Hull University Secularist, Atheist, and Humanist Society (HUSAH) will be holding 'Operations Clean-Up' on Sunday 15th November 2015 to clean up the local area. HC discussed that the students had organised the event themselves, and explained the importance of capturing and promoting these events to show that students are willing to do their bit to help the community. JC mentioned that this type of thing would be useful to have on the university's Browser system.

IS asked who in the working group is representing non-HullSTARS houses, and discussed that there aren't a proportionate number of services requests coming through about students properties. Discussion was had regarding at what point does HullSTARS refer issues to Hull City Council, TP confirmed that if and when a





problem is raised and not addressed, or if there are any uncertainties, Hull City Council have been informed. TP discussed that there may not have been better as landlords are able to pick and choose which properties are put forward. Discussion was had about when reviews are left which highlight obvious health and safety issues and what the process should be. It was agreed that HullSTARS should contact the student directly and advise them that they are entitled to go directly to Hull City Council.

The Advice Centre's referrals were discussed, but as GR has left the meeting, it was agreed that TP would liaise with the Advice Centre to see what the policies are and to see if these need to be revised.

ACTION: TP to discuss with GR – IS may need to be involved for clarification. TP to include tenants rights on the tenant pages of HullSTARS websites.

IS discussed the Rent-Repayment orders, and that if tenants were aware that they could claim back rent, it may work to ensure landlords are doing remedial works in a more timely manner which would benefit all around.

More information can be found here:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/housing/repairs-in-rented-housing/disrepair-what-are-your-options-if-you-are-a-private-rented-tenant/asking-the-local-authority-for-help-with-disrepair/asking-the-local-authority-for-help-with-disrepair/>

9. Any other business

IS talked about changes in legislation.

Redress scheme – IS was aware that at least one member who had signed up to HullSTARS was not a member of one of the three Redress Schemes, IS mentioned that you can check whether landlords were members by doing an online search.

The Property Redress Scheme is authorised by the Department of Communities and Local Government to offer redress to consumers of Letting and Property Management Agents under the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013. This legislation came into force in October 2014 and holds a fine of £5,000 for non-compliance.

More information can be found here:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2014/978011116821/contents>

Renting a safe home – guide for tenants – this guide should be provided to all tenants, either physically or by website link to all tenants living in a property rented on AST's since 1st October 2015.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/412913/150309_How_to_rent_a_safe_home_final_.pdf

Housing and Planning Bill – at second reading.

Right to buy for RSL's.

Rogue Landlords List – landlords found guilty of a criminal offence.

Deregulation Act – brought in the standardised tenancy agreements and Renting a safe home - guide for tenants. The guide should be provided to all tenants, either physically or by website link to all tenants living in a property rented on AST's since 1st October 2015.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/412913/150309_How_to_rent_a_safe_home_final_.pdf

Under this legislation, if a tenant puts a complaint about remedial works to a landlord and has no response within 14 days, the tenants can complain to the council who may issue an improvement notice. Under new legislation the landlord then cannot evict the tenants for 6 months.

The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015 – came into force 1st October 2015.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2015/9780111133439/contents>

Legislation under consultation – government are currently looking at changing the definition of HMO's, which may see 5 bedroom properties, regardless of the number of storeys requiring a licence. There was also a discussion around bedroom sizes, whereby all rented bedrooms must be a minimum of 6.5m² without exception.

JC-HSLA talked about changes to wifi speed this year and that some properties will have difficulties achieving the speeds. TP confirmed that this has been discussed at length in previous meetings, and having spoken to KC and Pure Broadband, both companies said that the majority of properties should have no trouble meeting the 11.4mbps (half the national average speed).

The issue of bathroom tiles was also brought up and it was discussed that HullSTARS definition of readily cleanable was different from Hull City Council's. TP confirmed that this would be changed going forward, meaning that providing all bathroom walls are in good order, this will be marked as yes; thus not requiring fully tiled walls.

TP will also ensure that all properties that have already been inspected this year are amended, and Property Auditors briefed on the new way of answering this question.

10. Next meeting

Next meeting dates to be confirmed – Times will be looked at to accommodate the HullSTARS Administrator for the purpose of minute taking.

