

HullSTARS Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

27th May 2014 – 12.30pm

Meeting Room 2, Second floor, University House

Present:

Adam Shepherd (AS)	HUU Director of Commercial Services
Wayne Cullen (WC)	HUU Interim Membership Services Manager
Brittany Tomlinson (BT)	HUU Vice President Welfare and Community
Gina Rayment (GR)	HUU Advice Centre Manager
Toni Proctor (TP)	HUU Operational Support Manager
Jill Cooper (JC)	University of Hull Head of Accommodation
Christine Kirk (CK)	HSLA representative
Debbie Drake (DD)	HLA Representative

Absent:

Ian Sanders	Hull City Council Principal Environmental Health Officer
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Welcome and introductions, apologies from Hull City Council.

1. Meeting format and make up

AS - The format of the HullSTARS Advisory Committee going forward will include a balance of all key stakeholder parties, including a student representative, with only one stakeholder from each group to ensure the balance is achieved. At present there is a conflict of interest as Adam currently manages both HullSTARS and HUU Homes, therefore HullSTARS will move to Membership Services under the management of Wayne Cullen and Laura Curtis who is returning from maternity leave in August. Adam and Wayne will not sit on the panel going forward to avoid any potential conflict, as they will be directly responsible for any complaints. Should there be a need to attend they will, however any issues should be actioned as soon as possible following the Advisory Committee Meeting.

Meetings will be held once every three months at the same time and venue. Minutes will be available on the HullSTARS website for both students and landlords to view. Minutes will be circulated following the meeting.

CK enquired about the timescale for the minutes to be distributed. AS advised that minutes should be circulated within the week, unless there are holidays which would cause a delay. Toni is off for a week from this afternoon.

CK asked why Wayne would have a conflict. AS responded saying that Wayne would be dealing with any complaints regarding HullSTARS in order to remove any unnecessary layers and have a clear chain of communication and ensure that the complaint goes to where it needs to.

CK said that the point we were trying to get across is helping students to have a good experience finding accommodation. AS agreed stating that it was the responsibility of VP Welfare and Community to ensure this happens. Having looked into the process, feedback from Unipol suggested that by mixing accreditation and advertising didn't work, which is why HullSTARS was separate from external campaigns such as the housing week, housing fair and campaigns ran throughout the year which are for VP Welfare and Community to decide on.

JC asked how the information would be communicated, with CK stating that communication with The Scheme has been poor and is a concern to landlords. CK has attended the housing fair for the past three years and has been a landlord for the past 20 years. Who helps VP Welfare and Community to decide when it will be and how it is run?

DD believes that the idea is to help to inform students so that they gain the best information on the property and asked whether HUU will be removing the housing fair.

AS advised that HUU will be advertising HullSTARS through its literature, welcome week, and information sent out to students. If a housing fair goes ahead it will ultimately be the decision of VP Welfare and Community and the Membership Services Manager.

DD asked whether AS thinks there would be a fair?

BT advised that it is a political decision and would depend on her successor's policies, although she believes housing is on the manifesto.

JC asked when would landlords know about the fair?

AS advised that from August once the ops plans are done, these will be circulated at the next meeting.

CK is concerned that students seem to be getting the wrong message. GR informed her that we send out information to our students to tell them that there is a surplus of properties out there.

AS said that it would be up to the new VP Welfare and Community to help to point students in the right direction and to encourage them to check out the property ratings on HullSTARS. DD pointed out that this would rely on students knowing what streets to look for in order to use HullSTARS.

AS advised that we are moving to add the option of advertising, allowing landlords to also create an advert for their property.

Operational Responsibility

HullSTARS will be operationally separate from any other commercial ventures within HUU, in order to minimise any potential conflict of interest. HullSTARS will also be politically ring-fenced from influence on any criteria

changes, which would be required to be fed through the HullSTARS Advisory Committee through the HUU representatives.

As previously mentioned, any lettings policies or criteria for being admitted to the accommodation fair will not interfere with how HullSTARS operates, nor will HullSTARS interfere with the organisation of the Accommodation Fair or any lettings policies put in place by HUU.

HullSTARS Advisory Committee

The HullSTARS Advisory Committee (HSAC) will act as an expert group with knowledge of the market for student accommodation. The role of the Committee will be to:-

- Regularly review the HullSTARS accreditation process and recommend changes to the management of HullSTARS. This will include the Service Level Agreement between HullSTARS and individual landlords whose property is accredited.
- Review and comment on the medium term strategy and annual work plan and recommend changes if necessary.
- Recommend independent auditors who will undertake annual sample checks of HullSTARS ratings and review the results of these verifications and if necessary, recommend changes to the accreditation process and the ratings of individual properties.
- Give feedback on the day-to-day operations of the accreditation process.

In order to do this, the Advisory committee will be given regular updates by HullSTARS management and as a minimum prior to each Committee meeting.

Meetings will be held 4 times a year, the week preceding when the appeals panel would be scheduled to meet (January, April, July and October), or more frequently if at least 4 of the members wish to have additional meeting(s). HullSTARS management will respond to recommendations and proposals either in writing to the Committee members or verbally at the meetings.

2. Advertising and Pricing

TP informed that HullSTARS looking to work with a company currently offering advertising to landlords in Hull, StuRents as an advertising portal for tenants, as well as the possibility of our own advertising portal.

HullSTARS initially looked at Pads for Students as we are aware they have already reached out to Hull landlords, however after consultation found that their long term business plan is to charge for advertising which would then generate an additional cost to you as landlords.

TP then looked at other options and found StuRents that offers free advertising and also displays a property rating, enabling us to show the HullSTARS rating on any adverts. HullSTARS is looking to copy all information from HullSTARS for the adverts, which will automatically be

generated onto StuRents. By merging the websites, this should remove the need to re-input your information over and over, yet you would still have access to StuRents to make any amendments to the advertising should your property become let or any modifications made.

The price to join HullSTARS for next year is £40 for properties up to 5 bedrooms (plus £2.50 per additional bedroom), and £10 for advertising, in comparison to cities like Sheffield who charge £50 for an inspection plus £50 for advertising we feel this is very reasonably priced.

CK enquired if this is £10 per website. TP advised that the £10 would include advertising on StuRents and also our own advertising website which will be branded differently to HullSTARS, and should be set up early 2015 dependant upon the cost implication. Subscriptions to HullSTARS will be due for renewal from 1st September 2014.

3. HullSTARS Facts and Figures

Total registered	342
Properties published	616
Total audited	341
Number left to audit	0 (TBC)
Ratings online	20
Reviews	141
Photos	290
Tenant photos	34
Replies	1
Registered landlords	33
Documents	698

Themes and trends

Based on 183 property audits.

- 5.3% of audits showed that rooms are being rented out measuring less than 6.5m².
- 3.3% of properties did not have a locking mechanism on bedroom doors.
- 1.3% of properties did not have suitable front and back external doors. Most of these failed to comply due to lack of thumb turn locks.
- 88.6% of properties had banisters measuring below 900mm in height as per regulations, with some measuring as low as 540mm.
- 9.3% of properties didn't provide curtains or blinds to all windows, the majority failing due to the kitchen window.
- 23.3% of properties had less than 50% energy efficient light bulbs.
- 40% of properties did not have locks operable from the outside on bathroom doors.
- 13.9% of properties don't have fire doors with combined intumescent smoke strips and cold seals. Many doors that did have the above did not fit into the jam appropriately.
- 7% of walls and fences were in a state of disrepair, 58.2% having no fences dividing them from other properties.

- 14.5% of properties didn't contain a sufficient number of easy chairs for the number of tenants.
- 11% of properties provide no communal area.
- 9.3% of properties didn't have keys to ground floor windows.
- 7.9% of gates were not fit for use.
- 82.7% of properties had no working burglar alarm.
- 92.8% of properties didn't have a TV.
- 38.2% of properties showed evidence of damp, mould, condensation or peeling paper.

4. Criteria changes

- 3.3% of all baths complied with Hull City Councils standard for HMO's; this question will include a 30mm tolerance.
- 64.2% of hand basins were below the recommended size, this previously included WC's, and going forward will only apply the main bathroom sink.
- 56% of showers below the recommended size, going forward will include a 30mm tolerance.
- 71% of stairs non-compliant with current measurements, this will be amended going forward this will be changed to a minimum tread of 220mm, maximum rise of 220mm.

5. HullSTARS Awards

TP advised that the HullSTARS Awards are now open for submissions. You can download the submission form from the HullSTARS website and details of the individual awards can be found at <http://hullstars.co.uk/awards> Submissions will close at 5pm on 30th June so get entering. The awards are only open to HullSTARS registered properties/landlords, with the award ceremony being held on Monday, 15th December at University House.

6. Next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, 12th August at 12.30pm.

CK asked whether it will be an open meeting where anyone can come and listen as it comes across as quite secretive.

BT agreed that this might be a good idea, with AS stating that anyone attending would need to request to sit in and listen. Anyone sitting in should not interrupt and would not be invited to contribute. By allowing observers by request only would mean that anyone who does not comply would not be granted access again.

GR enquired about a landlord's forum as there used to be 3 per year to give landlords a voice. It was agreed to leave it as an open meeting for now to see how we get on, and discuss it again should the need arise. AS agreed, as did BT who said that it may be beneficial for students to sit in and view how the process works also.

7. Any Other Business

DD advised that HLA members are concerned that they are having reviews on their properties despite not signing up and will be looking into the legalities of it.

AS informed that he has researched the model extensively. As the model is based on Trip Advisor he looked at past cases where people have tried to sue Trip Advisor for reviews left of their hotel/restaurant but they have been unsuccessful.

DD asked if it is right that you cannot respond to reviews unless you are registered. AS said that he would look into it.

(Post meeting) You are unable to respond to any reviews on HullSTARS unless you have registered that particular property with HullSTARS. Being a member of HullSTARS gives you the benefit of responding and reporting any feedback on your property. If you are not a member, you are able to contact the HullSTARS administrator, however if the review is not defamatory it will not be removed from the website.

HullSTARS will be having a stall at the graduation ceremonies which will be taking place from 14th-17th July, at which we hope to see a large jump in reviews on the HullSTARS website.

