



HullSTARS Advisory Committee Meeting

Wednesday 3rd February 2016.

10.30am

Meeting Room 2, University House

Attending:

Toni Proctor (TP) (HullSTARS); Samantha Page (SP) (HullSTARS); Ian Sanders (IS) (Hull City Council); Jill Cooper (JC) (Head of Accommodation – University of Hull); Debbie Drake (DD) (Humber Landlord Association); Christine Kirk (CK) (Hull Student Landlord Association); Michael Rainsford (MR) (StuRents).

1. Apologies

Ashleigh Davies (VP Welfare & Community) – Attending Senate.

Gina Rayment (Advice Centre) – Off work on sick leave.

2. Housing Fair Report

TP began by summarising each question on the Housing Fair report to give overall feedback. She also informed the meeting that only 10 out of 27 landlords engaged.

TP then discussed each question within the survey report in more detail.

Key points raised during the discussion of this report were:

Parking: TP outlined the correspondence sent out to landlords prior to the event in relation to parking as a result of feedback from last year, including multiple emails and inclusion in the landlord's newsletters. On the day of the Fair and in the survey parking caused several complaints. DD suggested moving forward making it clearer on correspondence emails will help solve this, and simply getting the message out to get there early.

Décor: TP outlined to the meeting how HullSTARS had made a conscious effort to take on board feedback from previous years regarding décor and themes. Results showed that 10% of attending landlords didn't like the décor (1 respondent). Lighting was improved and a "star" theme brought into the fair, however it was minimal as she felt it more important to spend money on marketing the event than decorating it. The group agreed that marketing and advertising should take priority.

Marketing and Advertising: JC made reference to the feedback on Question 3 of the report stating that "not enough students knew about the event" but mentioned to the group that landlords wouldn't necessarily have seen it was a large portion was spend on online advertising directed to 18-23 years old who had shown an interest in the student union and university. It was suggested that there is more of a visual

presence on campus, TP noted that this is certainly something that can be looked into for next year, however noted that advertising around campus requires prior authorisation by the university.

CK referred to another quote made on the survey report about students being “ushered in from outside” agreeing that not many students came in off their own back. She felt this was due to lack of advertising prior to the event and directional advertising on the day, as students didn’t know so didn’t organise to come with friends or make time to come visit the fair.

It was also brought to CK attention during the fair that about 50/60 students who all came at once had been told during a lecturer that the fair was on.

CK then made reference to a figure of only 20% of students connect with Hull Student Union’s marketing, leaving 80% of students unconnected. CK suggested that the University of Hull should support HullSTARS more to ensure students get all the information. TP added that the University of Hull have been more supportive of HullSTARS this year due to the Community Strategy project.

JC added to this point that posters advertising HullSTARS and the housing fair were placed in all halls of residence to target first years and inform them. Gina advertised the event at the housing roadshow and Sabs went knocking on doors at the Halls of residence.

DD added that she certainly felt the fair had a higher number of first years attending than previous years.

TP then discussed with the meeting the different types of students, who could have had an impact of footfall. These include; final year students, Scarborough students, home students/students who commute (36%), mature students etc.

TP added that HullSTARS spent approximately £100 on Facebook advertising, specifically targeting students living in Hull, and of a certain age range to ensure first years/second years were targeted. TP was not sure how many views this advertising had.

ACTION: TP to liaise with the marketing department to collect data on how many views the Facebook advertising had and the number of students it reached.

DD felt that banners around the campus a week before would be a good way to generate interest.

CK referred back to her earlier point about seeing if there was any way to get the University of Hull to assist more, and to look at lecturers passing on the information during lectures or departments to inform their students.

JC enquired about the survey’s sent out to landlords. JC asked TP if there was any information from students about this. TP advised that this was something Ashleigh



Davies was looking into and possibly sending a survey to students about why they didn't attend the fair, if they knew about the event and what could be done for them to attend in future.

CK added to this that she asks every student she comes into contact with if they know about HullSTARS, however few knew and suggested that advertising is not getting into the right places and queried how are we missing students? CK asked if the Union could email students.

TP added that some students dismiss emails without reading them due to the sheer number they receive. TP noted that all students were emailed with details of the fair, as well as it being included in the weekly 'What's on' email. It was noted that students tend to view departmental emails as a priority.

CK asked if we could then get the departments on board to send emails with information to students and/or mention in lectures. TP noted that it is unlikely that departments will be able to push these events as they have a workload of their own to deal with, however it is something that can be explored.

ACTION: TP to investigate the possibility of departments sending emails to their students with information of HullSTARS events.

MR thought that it is great the housing fair came forward however the main issues StuRents have seen despite the No Rush campaign, students house hunting is predominantly led through panic/word of mouth – students see their friends signing up so they panic to do the same. This could be tackled by starting the advertising drive at the end of October to get HullSTARS and StuRents in their mind earlier. MR was keen to maintain the "No Pressure, No Rush" message, but also ensure that students know that we are here to help them when they are ready to look. MR added that by adopting this strategy, it would allow us to compete with the larger agents who start their advertising early.

MR advised the meeting that StuRents are in the top 3 Google results for searches on student accommodation in Hull.

CK asked MR if StuRents would be willing to promote the Housing Fair. MR replied that it is absolutely something StuRents could do, and that he would be more than happy to assist the marketing and advertising of the event with an online presence running alongside.

TP added that it would be useful to have some information about the downside to signing early or panicking into signing a contract. MR agreed that it is important to get the panic under control as early as possible, and this can be achieved by effective advertising at the correct time.

MR added further, that due to the close proximity of agents offices in Hull to the university campus, pressure is put on students extremely early by these companies, so uninformed/new students walk into their offices and sign contracts out of panic as they have conflicting information and may not receive information from the university until December. This emphasises the importance of getting the message of "this is

where you need to go” out to students as early as possible to direct them towards HullSTARS and StuRents and away from running to the larger agents in a state of panic.

MR added that more agents may be willing to support HullSTARS if they can see it having a greater influence on the student market and lettings. By bringing the date of the advertising campaign forward as well as the Housing Fair, landlords would see the benefits of joining HullSTARS. MR suggested that by waiting until December it is an easy way for them not to engage as they might feel they are missing out on the best of the market if advertising doesn't start until December.

DD added that she feels the No Panic No Rush campaign is working as she had students view her properties who have been on 30 previous viewings.

TP added that it is VP Welfare's decision when we being to promote housing and that MR is planning on sending a document to AD to highlight the rationale for bringing the date forward.

JC asked MR what the time frames were for other universities in regards to lettings.

MR replied that cities with multiple universities begin their advertising at the very start of the academic year.

Cities of similar size to Hull generally start their advertising last week in October.

MR informed the meeting that Durham University moved their date year upon year from February to January and then to December. He added that StuRents no longer work with Durham University, however they advertise almost 100% of student beds in the city.

MR added that in a city of similar size to Hull, approximately 60% of beds are let before Christmas break which is why he feels the earlier we advertise the better.

TP added that AD, VP Welfare and Community is keen to get the date right for the benefit of our students and will hold a meeting to discuss once the document has been sent over.

ACTION: AD to bring updates at the next meeting.

TP added that with the help of the University of Hull's Community Strategy, one of the aims is to increase the profile of HullSTARS, this should then help as more students will be aware of what HullSTARS is, and therefore know about our events.

Timing of the event: TP referred back to the Housing Fair report and comments that the fair was too early, and also that the event was too late. TP surmised that we cannot hold it any later in December as a large proportion of students start to go home for the vacation period. If we moved the event to after Christmas, the first available date is reading week, which in 2013/14 proved to be greatly unpopular. The



next available date after that is going back to Refreshers week, which was again unpopular last year.

The group agreed that the beginning of December is the most appropriate time for the Housing Fair and that

CK advised the meeting that Birmingham University have two housing fairs. TP felt that HullSTARS need to get the first fair right first before considering another one, and given the extra workload it would not be worthwhile if feedback continues to be so negative.

CK agreed but expanded on her suggestion asking if a more informal event would be more successful. CK suggested that an evening have a drop in type event where students could come and have an informal chat with a view for singles or twos to form groups over a hot drink.

It was agreed that this would be a good idea and TP noted that she would raise this with AD to see if this is something she would have funds for or how it would work.

TP had concerns as to how many landlords would be interested and would turn up. But did agree that it was a great idea, and perhaps a good way of single students meeting other single students and matching up to form small groups.

MR added further that he is in the process of rolling out a housemate forum that would enable students to meet each other via an online forum and form friendship groups. He advised the meeting that he could host a webinar for anyone interested in how it would work.

ACTION: TP to discuss with AD.

ACTION: MR and TP to discuss whether something could be done together to host an event.

Organisation: DD felt that the fair was very well organised and she felt that this year there was a real sense of teamwork. She liked how the larger agents mingled with the smaller landlords and some stands were passing students on if they had nothing themselves.

Venue Location: A discussion was had about why Asylum was chosen as the venue for the Housing Fair. TP informed the meeting that if we were to use Staff House as mentioned in comments in the survey, we would have to pay for it, there would be restrictions as to when we could access the building and that since the refurbishment of the Students' Union, students used HUU's building more than Staff House.

CK asked TP if Asylum could cope with even more stalls given that HullSTARS has seen an increase in registered landlords this year. TP advised CK that we could use the adjoining John McCarthy bar if we needed more space.

DD would like to see more prominent advertising on the day, as the floor stickers weren't prominent enough. She also added more directional signage from reception would be beneficial.

CK asked if the sports hall could be considered as a venue. JC felt this was not a suitable location as it is out of the way for the majority of students, which could impact even further on footfall. TP agreed that the sports hall was out of the way and unless you were going specifically for the event, students are unlikely to pass and want to pop in.

A comment left in the survey about "Asylum was cramped" was discussed. DD gave her feelings on this survey review, stating that she thinks Asylum is a good venue to host the fair, however she had concerns on the day that large pop up banners were blocking sides of stalls, making it difficult to manoeuvre from behind stalls.

TP stated that if more landlords attended the fair, more money would be generated which would possibly allow us to look at hiring larger venues, but failing that it would be made clearer that landlords were not permitted to have advertising blocking the gaps from behind tables.

The group discussed the comment about no free tea and coffee, and it was agreed that at £255, the money would be better spent on marketing.

Leads from the Fair: A discussion was had about how 50% of landlords were able to generate leads from the fair. CK asked if there was any possibility of separate advertising for smaller landlords as a lot of students visiting the fair were looking for smaller landlords than larger agents or corporate organisations, as they were looking for that personal touch. TP advised that this would be possible as we have to market to everyone and cant market individuals as that would show preferential treatment and be unprofessional.

MR added that this could be something StuRents could look into facilitating. They could explore making a profile for the landlords describing how many houses they have in their portfolio etc. However it would be doubtful this is something a student would specifically search for. TP agreed this is something worth exploring as this had been discussed in the past.

The choice of day for the fair: A discussion was had about a comment made in the survey about having the fair on a Wednesday, as this is the day students have free time.

TP explained in detail the rationale behind choosing Tuesday as the day to hold the fair. She explained the decision was based upon revenue generated in the commercial sectors within the Union (Eats, The Shop and Sanc) and the footfall count in University House being at its highest.

TP explained that although students get time off on Wednesday afternoons, many use this for sporting activities or to plan in their part time work. Given footfall levels during the week, Wednesday has been confirmed as the quietest day of the week in terms of university services.

The discussion about the report was then concluded.



3. Campaigns & StuRents

TP began by discussing how the No Rush campaign has been extremely successful this year.

DD agreed that the message has certainly reached students and they are taking their time, however enquiries have tailed off. DD raised a concern that if enquiries don't pick up a little then perhaps something has gone wrong somewhere and the message has been misinterpreted.

TP added further that it is now even more important to get HullSTARS and StuRents message across, with news of four agents forming a working together, none of whom are supporting the union's campaigns.

DD then offered MR some feedback in relation to StuRents website. She stated she had noticed that the HullSTARS star rating had been moved to the bottom of the property profile page on StuRents. DD stated how she feels this makes the rating look lost and takes away the impact of the score. She asked MR if this could be rectified.

MR thanked DD for her feedback and replied that this is something he would look into, moving the rating score back to the top of the page.

ACTION: MR to assist making HullSTARS properties more prominent on searches.

TP then moved the meeting onto discussing Advice Centre figures. In summary, the number of complaints of house mate disputes resulting in contract release enquiries increased this academic year to last. TP suggested that going forward, with the new Advice Centre software, this data could be used as an indication of how well the No Rush campaign was, and we'd hope to see this reflected in next year's figures.

JC added that this could be due to the fact there is a larger proportion of student diversity, which could have an impact and trigger problems.

IS stated that he is still not receiving referrals from the Advice Centre regarding service request complaints for housing condition complaints.

CK asked at what point should referrals be made, and also if there was a procedure to follow for referring to Hull CC.

IS replied that he cannot force referrals, however HullSTARS has approximately 20% of the student market registered with them, leaving 80% of the market which complaints could potentially come to the Advice Centre, however no referrals are being made.

TP agreed to arrange a separate meeting with IS, TP and Gina Rayment upon her return to work to discuss this further.

ACTION: TP to arrange a meeting with IS and GR.

The meeting then moved forward to StuRents.

MR surmised that overall visits to the sites and searches for Hull properties is quieter than he would expect for this time of the year.

He commented that it has picked up slightly post-Christmas and they also noticed a shift in searches. Post-Christmas, there has been a 45% increase in specific searches for 1 & 2 bedroom properties, and a 30% decrease in searches for 4, 5 & 6 bedroom properties compared to pre-Christmas searches.

MR went on to inform the meeting that Hull's online student market is smaller than the national average. Comparing it to other cities of a similar time, Hull's market is approximately 60% smaller. His opinion is this because of the larger agents having their offices in such close proximity to campus. He feels they are able to cherry pick the market by advertising early to generate interest. Plus, students can simply walk in off the street.

MR feels it would be very easy to change this behaviour and bring the market online.

ACTION: MR to elaborate – communication to be sent to committee.

CK asked JC if the University of Hull provide any information about accommodation, HullSTARS and StuRents to second year students. JC replied that they include StuRents and HullSTARS in their information leaflets however first years make up most of the clientele numbers.

CK added that she feels the Union and University should protect and work with StuRents and HullSTARS and promote them both to second year students, as they take information home to show parents, who could then potentially visit both websites generating interest.

MR then went on to discuss average rental prices and thanked JC for the data provided from the University of Hull about their prices.

Discussion was had regarding adverts which display POA, and how students can understand what the average rental prices are when larger agents are displaying adverts with POA. MR advised that StuRents do not allow adverts to go live without a price displayed. It was felt that students could be equipped with more information



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about average house prices. TP added that this information would be useful and is something that VP Welfare could include in future housing campaigns.

DD added that it may also be beneficial for StuRents to show on the live listings which bills are included. This would make it easier for the student to see and understand and also make figures of average prices more accurate.

ACTION: MR to provide TP with average house prices so a document can be created to help inform students to then display on HullSTARS and StuRents.

MR was thanked for this update and left the meeting.

4. AOB

IS then asked JC about the new on-site accommodation being built. JC informed the meeting that this was a 560 bed halls of residence to be completed by September 2016. The target market is first year students and post-graduates, however made it clear they were not looking to conquer the post-graduate market. JC further explained that the complex will be divided into one bedroom apartments, deluxe en-suites and pent house apartments.

IS asked if there were any proposals for second years to which JC replied that 20% of rooms will be offered to second and third years which equated to approximately 125 students. JC added that they would no longer have Needler Halls which would decrease their portfolio by 167 beds.

A discussion was then had about planning permission in accordance to Article 4. IS explained how this is having an impact on the market, resulting in supply and demand being suppressed.

5. Future Plans

TP informed the committee that she is looking into creating a standardised tenancy agreement. This is not looking to be enforced, it is purely an information tool to help landlords and provide them with a "Best Practice" example which they can take from to improve their own tenancy agreements.

TP also added that a suggestion from the Waste Management meeting was to consider including bin and waste management in the contract criteria. Due to lack of time TP was unable to discuss this further.

ACTION: TP to discuss this in more detail at the next meeting.

6. Next Meeting

Wednesday 11th May 2016 at 10.30am in Meeting Room 2, University House.

Action Table:

Toni Proctor	To liaise with the marketing department to collect data on how many views the Facebook advertising had and the number of students it reached.	To be completed by 12/02/2016
Toni Proctor	TP to investigate the possibility of departments sending emails to their students with information of HullSTARS events.	Summer 2016
Ashleigh Davies	Inform TP her decision about housing fair dates based on the information given in MR report	Next meeting
Toni Proctor & Michael Rainsford	MR and TP to have a discussion about how we could facilitate a house mate forum	To be completed by 12/02/2016
Toni Proctor	TP to arrange a meeting with IS and GR to discuss advice centre referrals.	To be completed by March 2016 (depending on staff sickness)
Michael Rainsford	MR to provide TP with average house prices so a document can be created to help inform students. To then display on HullSTARS and StuRents.	Summer 2016
Toni Proctor	TP to liaise with MR about how we can easily change the market by moving it online, and then disseminate the information to the group.	To be completed by 12/02/2016
Toni Proctor	TP to discuss standardised contracts in more detail at the next meeting.	Next Meeting



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