



HullSTARS Advisory Committee Meeting

20th July 2016 – 10.30am

Meeting Room 6, University House

Attendees:

Toni Proctor (HullSTARS); Kate Herring (Advice Centre); Ian Sanders (Hull City Council); Jill Cooper (University Accommodation Manager); Debbie Drake (Humber Landlord Association); Christine Kirk (Hull Student Landlord Association).

Non-committee members:

Michael Rainsford (StuRents); PC Andy Allen; PC Steve Morley; Sgt Jo Harvey; Elinor O'Neill; Dan Allison; Danny Gough; Jeb Alphonsus; John Constable; Graham Borrill; Amanda Freeman; Marian Bvumburai; Robyn Steward and colleague.

1. Welcome/Apologies

George Bainbridge – Vice President for Welfare and Community (VPWC)

2. Successes from 2015/16

TP discussed general figures from 2015/16, comparing them to the previous year as shown in the table below:

	2014/15	2015/16
Total properties	180	273
Total beds	657	1624
Total re-inspections	27	50
Average score	69%	74%
Total biennial subscriptions	25	57

TP gave background into what a biennial subscription is, explaining that landlords could choose to opt in for 2 years by paying upfront, this would involve one audit inspection in the first year, the rating would then be valid for the full two year without requiring another visit. Landlords

would benefit from all of the benefits of an annual subscription over the two years, as well as a reduced re-inspection fee of £15 for those already on a biennial subscription. Biennial subscriptions we're introduced as a result of landlord feedback. TP thanked landlords for providing their feedback over the past three years.

TP commented that due to the improvements made by landlords over the 50 re-inspections, ratings increased by 90 boundaries, with some properties jumping from a 0 to 5 stars, and others with smaller increases from 3 to 5/4 to 5 etc.

TP then gave feedback from the Housing Fair, which took place 1st December 2015, the table below was shown:

	2014/15	2015/16
Info prior	92% +	100% +
Marketing	65% -	50% -
Dates	79% too late	80% right date
Organisation	78% +	90% +

TP discussed that the figures came from landlord feedback from the event in 2015/16 (December) and 2014/15 (February).

TP noted that whilst the marketing figure showed that 50% of respondents thought that the marketing wasn't great, this was a 15% improvement on the previous year. The date was noted as changing from February in 2014/15 to December 2015/16, again based on feedback from landlords.

MR questioned how many students thought that the date should have been earlier than December, TP confirmed that students were not consulted in this instance, and that the decision on the date was down to the VPWC at the time, Ashleigh Davies. CK asked whether that decision was still down to VPWC, TP confirmed that both the date and the organisation of the event going forward would sit solely with HullSTARS for continuity.

Overall, 70% of landlords rated the fair positively, this is the same figure as the year before despite an increase in positive scoring elsewhere in the report, and 80% of landlords wanted the students' union to continue to host an annual housing fair, again the same result as 2014/15.



The Waste Management Multi-Agency working group was established in 2016. From there HullSTARS created waste management pages on the website with information on bin days, what goes in each bin, Bring Out Your Rubbish Days and information on recycling in 12 different languages available to both landlords and students.

The new look website has been a success, with students with feedback to suggest that the site is more aesthetically pleasing and easier to navigate. We had a landlord comment on difficulties with navigating the site so asked for landlords to provide feedback via the Landlords' Newsletter but haven't had any response. An internal staff survey found a few areas for improvement and will be discussing these with the web developer for implementation in the coming months.

The April Housing Social saw 35-40 students attend, as well as Michael Rainsford launching the StuRents Find Housemates forum. MR discussed how the forum works, allowing students to advertise a spare room in their house, or for students looking to share but looking for housemates to post a listing. MR noted that since the April launch there has not been much advertising of the forum and that there are improvements that can be made. MR asked if TP can consult and discuss improvements. To view the forum, click [here](#).

CK asked about how many hits the forum has had. MR said that there is good flow, but students can reply via private message as well, and this figure has not yet been calculated. TP confirmed that both HullSTARS and the Advice Centre have been directing students to utilise the forum.

TP noted that they had given away free pizza at the Housing Social, the Advice Centre had been there to deal with any housing issues, as well as HullSTARS and VPWC speaking to groups and putting them together having found out about their interest. Feedback from students was really positive and prompted HullSTARS to host additional Housing Socials going forward.

MR discussed the data quality and noted that StuRents are working to improve the adverts in terms of listing rooms within properties as opposed to full houses, for example showing the difference between 1 room in a shared house and a 1-bedroom apartment.

Action: MR and TP to discuss improvements to the Find Housemates forum.

TP discussed the success of their Promotional Staff at the 2 Review Weeks, Housing Social and Housing Fair, at which they gathered a total of 1290 reviews. TP noted that the number of reviews from events and organically has increased dramatically, leading to more students knowing what HullSTARS is, and understanding that they could both leave reviews, and use reviews to make a more informed choice when choosing their house.

DD raised concerns that one of her tenants had felt rushed into leaving a review and as a result only wrote two words on their review. TP agreed that this was a training issue and would be addressed this year during staff training.

3. Plans and Price2016/17

TP talked about the events planned in for 2016/17, these are as follows:



TP confirmed that there would be no changes to the criteria for 2016/17. It was agreed that after three years, the criteria is in a good place and that it gives a good indication as to the quality of a property.

Pricing for 2016/17 will remain the same for the 4th year running, this is also unchanged from the £45 that The Scheme charged previously.

CK questioned the pricing of biennial subscriptions and whether a discount should be applied as no audit is required in the second year.

TP explained that the £45 covers only the staffing costs for the audit, and not the administration that is involved throughout the course of the full two years. TP explained that HullSTARS falls under the charity side of the business and therefore runs at a loss, the additional payment for a biennial subscription helps to offset the loss, but the money is still used to cover administration costs. JC asked how much of a loss HullSTARS makes; TP could not give a figure on this.

TP confirmed that payments would be accepted for subscriptions from **1st August -31st October 2016**. TP explained that some landlords ask to sign up after this date last year but were refused on the basis that all dates are to allow for effective planning of the Housing Fair given the condition of needing to sign up a minimum of 50% of a portfolio in order to attend.

CK asked when the cut off for signing up to the Housing Fair would be, this was confirmed as **31st October 2016**.

CK mentioned that in previous committee meetings we'd found that not all landlords were signing up the full 50% required to attend and enquired as to what would be done about it. TP noted that through conducting the student reviews and asking who their landlords are, HullSTARS have been able to improve their database by adding landlord details for non-registered properties. Through this, it has been noted that there have been 1-2 landlords who did not sign up the full 50% and that this would be addressed with the landlords concerned should they wish to attend this years fair. Should the landlord not put on the full 50% of properties we know about, they will not be permitted to attend the fair.

4. Awards

TP confirmed that the HullSTARS Award submissions are **now open** for landlords who were registered in 2015/16, with submissions closing **30th September 2016**. The shortlist will be announced **31st October 2016** and the winners will be presented live on stage at the Housing Fair in December.

TP discussed the benefits of applying for the HullSTARS Awards as being:

- Certification
- Exposure at the Housing Fair
- Banner at the Housing Fair
- An all student email sent out announcing the winners of the awards
- Social media exposure through HullSTARS and HUU
- The HullSTARS Awards page on the HullSTARS website

CK asked whether the information of historic winners would be kept on the site. TP commented that CK had previously mentioned that the page was too cluttered with information so the previous winners would not be on the main page, however there could be a link to another page which would display this information.

Action: TP to create historic HullSTARS Award Winners page to link from current awards page.

5. StuRents news

MR gave a presentation on future plans for StuRents. MR confirmed that StuRents had been in Hull for 18 months, and they they are working to give an end to end service, allowing landlords to sign tenancy agreements, collect rents and protect deposits. MR noted that StuRents could demo the eTenancy faculties to interested parties.

JC asked about the guarantor process, MR confirmed that at the moment students can provide details of the guarantor and that StuRents also have a plug-in with Housing Hand. JC asked how popular the eTenancy has been so far, MR commented that by November they would expect around 50% of domestic and international students to be signing up using this method.

CK asked about fees, MR confirmed that the tenancy side would be free of charge, but due to the transactions, the rent side would be available at a cost as a product.

MR talked about integration with My Deposits that will show proof of deposit protection on screen. It was noted that the system is paperless.

MR gave some insights into the data available to StuRents via the platform and talked about how they have been building on a strong 18 months through data quality; account manager; pre-approved ASTs; verifications; online presence; content and timing.

MR discussed this opinion that the Housing Fair should be brought forward in line with the start of the house-hunting season and talked about the need for good quality data which could be provided to students to give them accurate market information.

JC asked if there were any statistics from cities with earlier housing events about the number of issues there had been with breakdowns of friendship groups. MR said that it is easy to blame





tenancy issues on the breakdown of friendships, but that StuRents have found that in other cities the market is often driven by the university asking about whether students want to stay on, often earlier than in other landlords and agents. JC commented that this is contradictory to the information she has had previously and is not the case in Hull.

MR commented that he believes that the breakdown of households is not solely down to signing early, but due to lack of sufficient data early on, for example average house prices. JC commented that students have taken much longer this year to find accommodation. TP commented that as a students' union are not trying to stop students signing early on, but trying to give them the tools they need to be able to find a house when they feel ready to, and not because they feel pressured into it.

MR commented that the university and unions involvement late on can mean that they are missing out on 50% of the house-hunting season, and noted that they have information from other university's and union's to support an earlier season.

TP commented that information will be available to students about house hunting at the Housing Socials, however this will be available on request and not advertised before the Housing Fair. MR noted that he could provide information on average house prices, the number of properties available by location and house size.

Action: TP to discuss with MR how StuRents data can be used and when.

CK felt that students are being pressured too early, and from her experience talking to students and as a parent feels that encouraging students to sign early would be wrong. JC agreed, noting that first years in halls don't know whether they want to stay in university accommodation early and commented that it could be a welfare issue to promote earlier house-hunting.

Danny Gough echoed the importance of providing students with information early in order to reinforce the No Pressure message. TP and MR commented that StuRents is already in the process of sharing this information and is awaiting co-operation from the university.

Action: JC to confirm details with MR and TP so that the dashboard can be created.

CK asked whether this information could be available before students arrive which would also ease the worries of parents. JC raised concerns about not all properties showing on StuRents are registered to HullSTARS. MR commented that it depends on the take up of HullSTARS and that the number of remaining properties is proportionate.

MR noted that only having one page about private accommodation in the University's Accommodation Guide without any data may not be as beneficial to students. By providing average house prices and number of houses available by bed space would equip students with information from the start of their university journey. JC commented that the Accommodation Guide would always have more information about university accommodation.

CK discussed concerns that continuing students don't get enough information on the private sector from the University and will only have the little information provided in the Accommodation Guide from their first year to go on.

Robyn Steward enquired about the demographics of students looking for accommodation in November as Leeds the market is much later. MR answered saying that second year students usually look earlier because they are more informed, and that bigger groups tend to look earlier.

Robyn also questioned the presence of HullSTARS on the StuRents website, commenting that there is nothing to give information about what HullSTARS is and the presence of the HullSTARS rating. MR commented that students may not know what the difference between star ratings signifies, Robyn noted that most people understand the difference between a 1 and 5 star rating.

Robyn discussed searches and it was commented that as on Amazon, you can filter by ratings. MR agreed that StuRents could do more and commented that he'd need to work with HullSTARS to improve this system.

TP noted that having a filter by star rating may be beneficial.

Action: MR and TP to discuss how the information about HullSTARS on StuRents can be improved made more visible and prominent.

Danny Gough noted that landlords will shortly be hit by higher rates of tax, and the HLA predicts that by 2020, a house currently paying £750 rent PCM will be increased to £1500. Danny questioned whether StuRents would consider putting a 'Price Freeze' banner for landlords who did not increase pricing. MR answered that this wouldn't be done as the system could become open to abuse. On the property page there would be information about that street pricing so students would be able to see whether the pricing was competitive.

DD asked whether prices would have a breakdown depending on whether bills are included; MR confirmed that all average prices would be shown as excluding bills.

6. Humberside Police

AA talked about the Crime Reduction Initiative headed by PC Steve Morley. AA presented that a large number of burglaries in Hull, particularly among student properties are as a result of doors and windows not being closed and secured. Humberside Police have printed posters which as part of the initiative they would like landlords to display at both front and rear exit doors. The initiative would also involve the landlords giving out keyrings with their keys to new tenants.

PC AA also talked about registering property to immobilise.com using the serial number and asked landlords to help to promote immobilise.com to their tenants. AA talked about the benefits of signing up and that it helps the police across the country to re-unite stolen items to their rightful owners. Humberside Police will provide landlords with forms which the students can complete which the police will then collect and process.



Once processed, tenants will be sent an email with the Student Survival Guide and details of an immobilise account which they can register more property to. AA asked that landlords promote the Student Survival Guide on their websites and social media feeds.

PC SM commented that there had been a spike last year between September - January in insecure burglaries along Newland Avenue and Beverley Road, these occur day and night. SM noted that the aim of the initiative is to make students less likely to become a victim.

SM discussed that this year is the first year of the trial and that any landlords who are interested in joining the trial could speak to him after the meeting for further details.

TP talked about the new HullSTARS Safety and Security pages on the HullSTARS website which have details of immobilise.com as well as a PDF download of the Student Survival Guide available to both registered and non-registered landlords.

TP thanks Humberside Police for their attendance.

7. Any Other Business

DD commented on an increase of street drinking and asked Humberside Police about no drinking zones. SM confirmed that the full length of Beverley Road and Cottingham Road are no drinking zones, but the streets off Newland Avenue are not. CK also noted that drinkers should be advised to take their cans as students are often blamed for leaving this mess. SM asked that anyone who experiences this could contact him with details of locations, dates and times to that this can be investigated.

JC gave updates on the university and noted that 50% of applications for new students applied to live at the Courtyard. Numbers are 460 up compared to last year, and there are 400 more insurance applications compared with last year. JC discussed the relationship with HUU Homes and asked landlords to get in touch with Paul Andrews with any vacant properties. JC also noted that the university are funding administrative support to allow Paul Andrews to conduct re-inspections where work is required. TP commented that the administration would be done by Samantha Page, but assured the group that this would be solely for administration to avoid a conflict of interest with her role at HullSTARS.

JC also noted that landlords who are 'given' students by the university will be asked to release any student who intercollates or leaves university within the first 6 weeks, failure to do this will impact on whether the university will use a particular landlord in the future given the impact this has on the university's reputation.

CK implored the landlords in attendance to be pro-active in their approach to waste management, rather than just responding to a complaint that the rubbish is getting out of hand. Hull City Council are looking to introduce Compulsory City-wide Licensing of £500-£1000 per property, Danny Gough commented that given the multi-agency working this year, the streets are better than they have ever been, and commented that he is against the scheme as it will see good

landlords paying for the bad. Danny Gough noted that the additional costs to landlords will result in increased rents to students.

In response, IS confirmed that should this licensing come into force, he would be responsible for the licensing. IS commented on the petition, which was signed by 71 people and as a result produced a report about the works that the council have already done. IS commented that selective licensing was not designed to deal with litter, and applies to all properties regardless of whether they are a HMO but noted that central government are looking to change the definition of a HMO.

CK came back to the point about landlords should be more pro-active and report waste to enforcement officers should they witness it, and work together to educate their students.

TP thanked the panel, landlords and external parties for attending the meeting and encouraged landlords to stick around to speak to Humberside Police officers about their new initiative.

Action List:

Responsible:	Action:	Deadline:
Michael Rainsford and Toni Proctor	MR and TP to discuss improvements to the Find Housemates forum.	Friday, 9 th September
Toni Proctor	TP to create historic HullSTARS Award Winners page to link from current awards page.	Friday, 29 th July
Michael Rainsford and Toni Proctor	TP to discuss with MR how StuRents data can be used and when.	Friday, 12 th August
Jill Cooper	JC to confirm details with MR and TP so that the dashboard can be created.	Friday, 5 th August
Michael Rainsford and Toni Proctor	<i>MR and TP to discuss how the information about HullSTARS on StuRents can be improved made more visible and prominent.</i>	Friday, 12 th August

Next meeting: 3rd August 2016, 10.30am-12pm – Meeting Room 2, University House.