



HullSTARS Advisory Committee Meeting

11th July 2018 – 10.30am

Meeting Room 6, Student Central

Attending:

Toni Proctor – HullSTARS Manager; Shelly Bennett – HullSTARS Administrator; Andy Costigan – President for Welfare and Community; Kate Herring - Advice Centre Advisor; Ian Sanders - Hull City Council; Michael Rainsford - StuRents; Jill Cooper - University Head of Accommodation; Mark Badham - Humber Landlord Association; Christine Kirk - Hull Student Landlord Association.

1. Welcome/Apologies

Andy Costigan sent apologies as he's attending student graduation ceremonies.

2. HullSTARS Plans for 2018/19 – Toni Proctor

TP discussed the changes to the aesthetic of the HullSTARS website, bringing it in keeping with the new Hull University Union branding. TP noted that there would be a change to the HullSTARS logo, and marketing material including certificates would change this academic year.

Navigation for hullstars.com would change slightly, allowing users to utilise drop down menus rather than having several clicks through to a page, and the wording has been amended slightly to make it more understandable to students who may not be familiar with the service, including 'Inspection Rating' and 'Tenant Rating'.

TP explained that audit reports would all be uploaded to the system once inspections were complete. These would remain on file for 3 years, allowing landlords to find all documentation in one place and be able to compare results from previous years.

CK asked if students would be able to see the full reports, TP confirmed that these will be stored like all other documents and only visible to the landlord.

Payments will eventually be handled online. There will be no change to the way that payments will be taken, but details of what's been paid, how much and the reference will be accessible from the HullSTARS website for ease. Pricing for 2018/19 will not change, this cost has not increased now for 5 years.



TP discussed changes to the criteria, namely the increase of wifi speed 18.1mbps, half of the UK's average speed, and also the removal of questions where benefit of the doubt has been given previously. TP confirmed that the removal of some questions would have an impact on scoring due to the audit working on percentages but confirmed that after trials it hadn't had a huge impact. TP noted that if some properties were just on the boundary of a grading, this might mean that they would need to get an additional 'yes' in order to achieve the same rating this year. CK asked if a disclaimer could be put on the website to explain why some properties may have dropped in score, TP confirmed that this could be added to the FAQ's.

TP noted that HullSTARS Award submissions are now open for landlords signing up for 2018/19 and stressed the benefits of applying. More details can be found at <https://hullstars.co.uk/awards>.

Should landlords experience any discrepancies with their audits, they are advised to contact Toni Proctor directly at t.proctor@hull.ac.uk to ensure continuity and for training purposes.

The HullSTARS Code has now been renamed the HullSTARS Code of Best Practice. TP advised that this booklet is in the process being reworked and advised landlords to read it when it's completed. Although this won't necessarily mean that landlords have to follow it to the letter, she advised that if it is not followed and a landlord's actions or behaviour then brings the HullSTARS name into question, the landlord may be removed from HullSTARS and forfeit any payment made.

Finally, TP discussed the Housing Information Fair, taking place on 23rd October 2018 in Asylum. The event will be open to only HullSTARS landlords with a minimum of 50% of their portfolio signed up. Should there be any question about whether we have 50% of properties registered, the landlord will not be permitted to attend and would forfeit any payment already made. TP noted that KH would explain HUU's decision to move the date of the fair but commented that it was due to a piece of research conducted by HullSTARS and the Advice Centre.

ACTION: TP to email when HullSTARS Code of Best Practice finalised.

ACTION: TP to email landlords when new website is complete.

3. Hull City Council update – Ian Sanders

IS started by saying that as the HLA has started legal proceedings regarding the council's enforcement policy, and that he would not be able to comment and may not be able to answer some questions at the end of the meeting.



IS gave the definition of a HMO and discussed the differences between a HMO and HMO subject to licensing. HCC currently have 358 properties subject to licensing in Hull.

Legislation is changing, and the definition of a licensable HMO will now remove the number of storeys, therefore any house with 5 or more occupants, not related by blood or marriage, sharing a kitchen or bathroom will now be subject to licensing.

IS confirmed that the council is working to contact over 2000 landlords with properties in the city, and they are using various methods including contacting those who advertise properties online.

IS explained the lack of guidance from central government in relation to the changes and noted that it had been understood that payments and applications were to be taken from 1st October 2018, however the council have since had clarification on the matter and have been advised to start taking applications as soon as possible. IS explained that this had caused a few issues as the new online application system is in its final stages of testing, and not quite ready for applications to be submitted. IS confirmed that this has been a frustration as the council will not be accepting paper applications going forward.

It was queried whether applications would have to be submitted for each property individually and it was confirmed by IS that they would.

JC queried how landlords would be notified when the application system would be ready. IS apologised that he couldn't give a clear answer but expected that an email would be sent to all landlords identified as having properties affected by the change in legislation.

IS confirmed that the cost of licensing would increase to account for the additional workload, at the cost of £150 per bedroom to cover 5 years. IS confirmed that any bedroom under 6.51m sq. would not be considered a bedroom, and that when submitted their applications, landlords would be required to submit scaled plans of 1:100. Cohesive and non-cohesive groups were discussed and IS noted that this would be taken into consideration on an inspection.

All information will be available on the government's website once confirmed.

CK expressed concern regarding the lack of time to complete works in time for October. IS confirmed that when applying, landlords will be issued with a



license condition document that would outline the works required and set timescales of their completion.

IS discussed the issue of sinks in bedrooms and advised landlords who think they may have a problem to get in touch with them directly.

CK queried whether a property signed off as compliant with building regulations would be overridden by the new legislation and IS confirmed that it would be.

4. StuRents update – Michael Rainsford

MR provided statistics that showed that page views of properties in Hull were up by 100% on last year, at >200,000 per annum. MR noted that the number of views increase could be as a result of StuRents encouraging students to shortlist, check with friends and do further research before committing to a property, alongside continued growth of the platform's presence in Hull in general.

MR stressed the importance of landlords keeping their listings up to date.

MR noted that they're working with a company called First Utility to create a platform for students to sign up to a complete package of utility bills and a support network regarding bills etc. More information can be obtained from the Account sections of your StuRents account.

StuRents have created an android and iPhone app to make contracts, payments and discussions with landlords easier. The app would allow the documentation for the property to be shared with tenants as a housing pack would be, maintenance issues to be recorded and make the process easier for tenants and landlords.

MR noted that the second phase of the app would be available later this year.

MR provided more statistics, noting that the average price searched in Hull was £77pppw, consistent with the last few years. The most common property size searched for was 4 bedrooms, followed by 3 beds.

MR noted that StuRents were continuing to invest in the app, looking at increasing the HullSTARS presence on their site.

CK enquired as to the cost of the app and MR confirmed that the non-white-labelled version of the app will be free, and he'd like to talk those interested in using the app.



5. University intake update – Jill Cooper

JC noted that the University portfolio has changed dramatically in the past years, with Kexgill taking over much of the Auckland Avenue/Cranbrook Avenue portfolio. The new build on campus will deliver 562 ensuite study bedrooms from September 2019. 1500 more bed spaces will be available on campus through a nomination agreement between UPP and the University.

It was confirmed that in September there will be 478 new bed spaces, the majority will be ensuites priced at £143pppw. JC confirmed that a further 122 rooms will be ready from January 2019, with the final stage due for completion in time for September 2019.

JC noted that the intake is slightly down on last year and there is no data available yet regarding clearing. JC noted that there is a reduction in the number of 18-year olds across the country and this is expected to continue until 2020.

There has been an increase in the number of mature students and local students, however there has also been a reduction in the number of international students.

JC confirmed that The Lawns is still in operation as a budget option for students.

6. Advice Centre update – Kate Herring

KH confirmed that housing is still one of the main issues that students use the Advice Centre for. KH discussed the research done with HullSTARS, specifically looking at students experience through housing. KH confirmed that with 100 responses, the research would be used to inform decision making and for publicity and marketing materials.

KH gave some headline statistics.

- 67 out of the respondents were happy with their accommodation.
- The 5 main issues students faced were: repair issues; housemate issues; landlords service; landlord behaviour; and contract issues.
- Most students were aware of the Advice Centre.
- Most students had not read HullSTARS reviews before signing for a house.
- Of the people who didn't attend the Housing Fair, most said it was too late in the year.
- Early signers experienced more housemate issues and problems with their landlord.



- More students who read HullSTARS reviews were happy with their accommodation than those who hadn't.

KH summaries that there is work to be done in promoting our services and that the rest of the survey is still being analysed to assess what information will be shared with students.

The main driver for the survey was to back up information HUU already had anecdotally. TP discussed that the survey results informed the decision to move the date of the fair earlier, therefore providing students will all of the information early enough so that they could make a fully informed decision. TP confirmed that the No Rush campaign would continue and stressed that the Housing Information Fair wouldn't be for lettings, but for helping students to see just how much is available.

TP noted that an external survey had been conducted on behalf of HUU which looked at a cross section of students, not just those engaged with the Union. The results of the survey showed that out of all of the ways we could present students with information about housing, their top pick was by far reviews from current tenants, in line with what HullSTARS currently provide.

CK queries how long reviews are left on the website as historic reviews would be helpful to showing which landlords have always performed well. TP confirmed that this is currently set at 3 years. CK discussed that she thought it should be longer, and after a show of hands it was decided that a quick poll would be the best way of seeing what other landlords thought. TP noted that the current system allowed for those properties where there was a change of landlord, or a landlord had vastly improved the quality of their service. It was discussed that going forward there may be a way of making amendments when properties change hands.

MB asked what happened with reviews with unfounded comments. TP explained that landlords with registered properties are able to report or reply to reviews of their registered properties. She discussed that the system allows landlords to reply without opening a dialogue as tenants don't receive a notification when someone replies as a landlord would. TP also talked about the use of replies as a customer service tool, likening the reviews to those on TripAdvisor and those landlords who take the time to reply come across better than those who don't. TP confirmed that reporting a review immediately removes it from the website where the next stage of the process kicks in. Full details of the reporting policy can be found on the HullSTARS website, search 'HullSTARS Process'.

7. Q&A



Simply Students suggested a more robust system for checking the validity of reviews and expressed frustrations as a landlord with how the system works. TP noted that this is something she'll look into.

Members discussed their concerns about the changes in HMO licensing and the impact not being able to apply now would have. Members endeavoured to discover the consequences of not completing application forms before 1st October. IS expressed his view that it would be unlikely that on 1st October 2018 officers from Hull City Council would make issuing fines a priority. IS noted that their focus for fines would be on those who had deliberately not applied as opposed to those who were struggling.

Whilst there was obvious tension about the legislation changes, it was agreed that there could be no resolve in this forum.

TABLE OF ACTIONS

	ACTION	COMPLETION DATE
Toni Proctor	TP to email when HullSTARS Code of Best Practice finalised.	1 st September 2018
Toni Proctor	TP to email landlords when new website is complete.	1 st September 2018