

The Scheme Executive

Notes of Landlords' Forum held on Thursday 8 June 2006 at the University of Hull

1. Chairman of the Executive

A letter from the Chairman, Ben Ball was circulated.

2. General Feedback on The Scheme

The general consensus was that The Scheme was progressing well and more smaller landlords had joined. The website was being increasingly used with 23,000 hits being recorded between January and (over what period of time?)

3. International Students

Problems centred around liability for Council Tax and students leaving with their rent unpaid. It was noted that contracts were not universal and might have different meanings in another country. It was agreed that students needed to be clearly informed that they needed to obtain a council tax exemption certificate from the University. In addition, a certificate of status, available from the University would indicate to the landlord the length of their period of study. Both documents could be mentioned in the contract. It was suggested that Belinda Garry might be able to obtain these documents and she agreed to check on this. Chris Baker (Hull City Council) agreed to check on the rules for Council Tax liability for students who were 'writing up' their PhDs. Belinda agreed to provide a suggested clause to be included in contracts.

Jenny Barton and Bob Bousfield had been working on a bullet-point list of responsibilities relating to accommodation contracts which could be translated for international students, as well as a standard contract. It was hoped that the bullet-point list could be printed on The Scheme letterhead.

Landlords were urged to visit The Scheme website: www.the-scheme.com to view minutes of meetings and other useful information which was regularly updated.

4. Security in Student Accommodation

PC Waudby, Crime Prevention Officer spoke about burglaries in student accommodation. Information on crime prevention was provided on Open Days and during Freshers Week with the aim of educating students as to how they might avoid becoming victims of crime. He stressed that landlords should make their properties as secure as possible. The 'PROBE' organisation could fit locks free of charge. Landlords present agreed that they would circulate security packs provided by PC Waudby to each property. Chris Baker reported that there were statutory requirements for properties relating to entry by intruders. It was noted that Endsleigh would give a 25%

reduction to landlords accredited by The Scheme. Despite landlords' best efforts with respect to security, students needed to know what was expected of them. For example, where rents were all-inclusive and the cost of heating was not a consideration for students, they might leave windows open rather than turn the heating down. All-inclusive rents were seen as a good marketing tool although this could possibly lead to a waste of energy. It was a decision to be made by the company and students.

Belinda reported that all landlords accredited with The Scheme would be supplied with a laminated and embossed certificate for each of their properties registered. Each property was allocated a registration number.

5. Lettings Policy and Accommodation Fair

The Executive would consider the schedule for the lettings policy at their next meeting. The University year would begin on Monday 25 September, later than previous years. After discussion it was agreed that the best date for the Accommodation Fair would be Wednesday 7 February 2007. Discussion took place regarding the most suitable venue. Belinda asked landlords to communicate Belinda agreed to publicise the date early on, reinforcing the message that students should not sign up to accommodation unless it was registered with The Scheme. Information would be provided to halls of residence. New students would receive a pack of information including details of The Scheme. It was noted that Hullfire did not carry advertisements from landlords who were not registered with The Scheme and had agreed to dedicate space to The Scheme in every issue. Any breaches of The Scheme regulations would be taken to the Executive, although the Memorandum of Understanding was needed before this could be done properly.

Discussion took place regarding publicising The Scheme, the Lettings Policy and Accommodation Fair via an email to all students. Belinda agreed to check how this could be done.

Landlords were asked to communicate their views to Belinda regarding when existing tenants should be allowed to sign up for the following year, if they wished to continue living in the same accommodation. She also asked them to let her know when their properties were let.

30 August was confirmed as the cut-off date for current members who wished to re-join The Scheme. After that date membership would not be possible, except for new landlords, who would be able to join at any time. Any queries in this respect, for example a new landlords with a large number of properties wanting to join, would be taken to the Executive.

Landlords confirmed that The Scheme was working well, with Belinda providing a very effective service as an arbiter.

6. Hull City Council - update on Licensing

Chris Baker asked landlords to let him know if they had vacant properties which they would consider letting under a partnership between Hull City Council and an organisation for homeless people. Hull City Council would provide a bond for them. Any landlords should contact Chris on ??????????

Chris and Belinda would be carrying out over 200 inspections between them between now and March. Chris said that potential benefits for accredited landlords were always being considered. He pointed out that electric central heating was easier to install and safety checks were more straightforward. Grants were available for central heating. Chris said that he would check whether this covered University-owned houses.

More training was to be made available on licensing. All student houses, including University-owned houses would count as Houses in Multiple Occupation. Applications for mandatory licensing needed to be made by 5 July 2006. Landlords should call 01482 300300 for an information pack. Most conditions were standard, but some might be specific to a particular property. On receiving an application, the council would decide whether to grant or refuse a licence. There was an appeal process.

Fees for unregistered properties of 5-7 persons would be £550 and £350 for accredited properties.

Transitional licensing was mandatory. It would be an offence for properties not to be licensed by 6 July 2006. University-owned houses would be exempt, as would Council-owned properties because they had their own codes of control.