

MINUTES OF THE LANDLORDS' OPEN MEETING
HELD ON TUESDAY, 09 JANUARY 2007
LCR – UNION HOUSE – UEA

Those Present:

Bell, Susan	Hawes, Lesley	Parker, Dr
Altman, Steven (SU)	Headden, Lydia (SU)	Parker, Mrs
Brown, Caryll	Hindle, John	Popely, D
Brown, Richard	Holmes, Lisa	Prewer, Elaine
Bye, Louise (SU)	Holmes, Peter	Ramjeet, M
Cook, Catherine	Hornsey, E	Reeve, I
Cox, Helen	Howell, Tom	Shields, Eddie (SU)
Edmonds, Jack	Iver, Bridget	Spencer, Marle
Eley, John (Brown & Payne)	Jackson, Martin	Spiro, Jo (SU)
Emery, Alastair (Norwich CC)	Kambli, Raj (Nfk. Constabulary)	Summers, Janet
Folkard, Anne	Lessiter, Matt	Sutton, Allan
Foyster, Joel	MacDonald, Sam	Warne, D
Gill, Howard	Massey, Rob	Williams, Matthew
Green, Robin	Morgan, Ian	Wing, Ruth (SU)
Gudgin, Jo	Murphy, Kevin	
Hawes, David	North, Tessa (SU)	

Apologies: Fox, Kathy Smith, David

1. Welcome and Introductions – Jo Spiro – Manager – Student Support Services

JS opened the meeting at 10H30 and introduced LB (Home Run Administrator), LH (Student Union Advice Centre Administrator), RW (Advice Worker), TN and SA (Sabbatical Officers). She also introduced John Eley - Brown and Payne (Electricians), Alastair Emery – Norwich City Council (HMO Licensing, Tenancy Deposit Protection Scheme) and Raj Kambli – Norfolk Constabulary, who were available to answer questions.

2. Home Run Update

LB reported on bed-spaces available on the HR List throughout 2006 as follows:

March	1372
June	408
September	104
January 2007	65

This demonstrates demand and supply very high, and how effective the Home Run service is.

3. Housing Event 2007

This is planned for 07.02.07, and the registration deadline for inclusion on the Housing List is 31.01.07. LB requested that all cheques are payable to 'Union of UEA Students', and that forms are completed and include post codes of both the LL home address and that of the property to be advertised. Certificates must be up to date at the time of the Housing Event. **ALL** properties must be registered, including those already filled for the next year, for which payment is also required. Hopefully LLs agreed that £25 was a reasonable fee to pay for the service received. JS reminded LLs that for years Home Run had not generated funds and the Student Union subsidised it, and as funds had diminished it had been necessary to introduce the fee.

A LL questioned who would monitor ensuring LLs registered. JS explained that when students come to the AC with documents/problems, details are cross checked on our database. If it becomes apparent that a property is not registered JS writes to the LL requesting them to register, include all documentation and pay the fee. Registration would be back-dated to February 2007 (Housing Event). A £50 penalty was suggested by a LL, in order to protect honest LLs – to be considered for the future. It is a breach of the Home Run Minimum Standards to not register all properties.

If you wish your property to be included on the database you need to have submitted:

The appropriate fee
A valid CORGI gas certificate
A valid NICEIC electrical certificate.
A valid Council Tax bill, if relevant.

JS stressed the importance of safety certificates and renewing on time. Students are informed if certificates in a Home Run registered property have lapsed. It had come to light that LLs must instruct engineers to test all appliances, it is not done automatically. A LL informed the meeting that CORGI had re-formatted their test sheet to include ALL appliances.

LB requested that LLs forward their registration forms as soon as possible to ease workload and not wait until the deadline. If they had students who may extend their tenancies it is easier to register the property and then not advertise.

A LL reported that following the HE 2006 it appeared that students were advised to 'fight' LLs over any problems. JS explained students were told to put any problems in writing so that there was a formal record, but sometimes the tone could be misinterpreted. Another LL reported receipt of texts re. problems and felt it was best to speak. All agreed good honest communication is necessary. JS reiterated that students were advised to treat their LL in the same way as which they wish to be treated.

H Gill, the LL Speaker at HE 2006, confirmed that any mention of being aggressive or combative was not made at the Event, but may possibly come from previous tenants or parents.

Another LL requested that it be emphasised at HE 2007 LLs to be contacted up to 22H00 re. properties from the list (they had been telephoned at 02H00), and once tenancy is taken ONLY to contact the LL out of normal office working hours if there was an emergency – and stress to contact ASAP – not leave a problem until the end of the week.

4. UEA Residences Update

Next Academic Year (38 weeks licence) room prices will range from £48.09 to £87.01 (en-suite) inclusive of all bills. Capacity is to house 3400 students, and this includes 120 new rooms. Campus accommodation is guaranteed to all First Year and International students.

5. Tenancy Deposit Schemes

A leaflet was available for all attendees, drawn up by Norwich City Council, explaining the Schemes in as much detail as was currently available – still awaiting further paperwork from relevant Government departments. JS reported that last year the Student Union Advice Centre had dealt with 67 damage deposit disputes totalling £20,000, of which £15,495 was returned to students. The new schemes, scheduled to commence on 06.04.07 would alleviate many problems. If a LL does not enter into a scheme the notice procedure becomes invalid and fines will be levied. Any deposit paid prior to this date does not have to be entered into a scheme, but deposits could be deferred until after 06.04.07. It may be suggested at the Housing Event that students try and agree this with LLs in order that deposits are included in a scheme. In the past some LLs have waited until July before monies are paid. It would be made clear to students at Tenancy Agreement appointments that the TDS was new and there may be difficulties.

Tenancy Deposit Protection overview (information not available at meeting).

The Government has awarded contracts to three companies to run tenancy deposit protection schemes from 6 April 2007 for AST in England and Wales. Deposits paid before this date are not in the scheme.

The Deposit Protection Service (the DPS) will run the single custodial deposit scheme, with the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators providing the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) service. **FREE to LANDLORD.** www.depositprotection.com

The Tenancy Deposit Scheme (TDS) insurance backed deposit protection and dispute resolution run by The Dispute Service. **Directed primarily at agents** www.tds.gb.com or call **0845 226 7837**. Fees for **landlords** from 6 April 2007 (exclusive of VAT, per **property** per year):

Corporate landlords	On application
Members of landlords' trade associations	£40.00
Unaffiliated landlords	£95.00

Tenancy Deposit Solutions Limited (TDSL) will run an insurance-based scheme, sponsored by the National Landlords Association and administered by Hamilton Fraser Insurance, which will be **directed primarily at landlords**. The Chartered Institute of Arbitrators will be the principal provider of ADR to the scheme. www.mydeposits.co.uk

“Fees for payable by landlords as they become due on a “pay-as-you-go” basis. A one-off joining fee is required in order to set up your account, payable in advance or at the point of protecting your first deposit. Thereafter, an annual membership renewal fee is required in order to keep your account live. For each deposit that is protected by the scheme a Deposit Protection Fee is required which will protect the deposit for the duration of the tenancy. You only pay this fee once for each deposit you take and hold from the tenant regardless of the period of time you continue to hold it. Each time you create a new tenancy and take a new deposit you will need to protect it with the Scheme and pay a new Deposit Protection fee. In respect of Joint Tenancies you only need to pay one Deposit Protection Fee in order to cover the total deposit - not the constituent parts of the deposit taken from each tenant party to the Joint Tenancy. **All fees are tax deductible and include VAT.** There are currently discounts available for fully paid members of the National Landlords Association. “

Individual and Company Landlords	Joining Fee (incl. VAT)	Deposit Protection Fee (per deposit incl. VAT)	Annual Renewal Fee (incl. VAT)
Standard Fees	£58.75	£30.00	£14.70
NLA Members	£47.00	£26.00*1 st 4 properties	£14.70

The landlord – not the tenant – will have the option to choose whether to safeguard the deposit in the custodial or insurance-based scheme.

A landlord will have 14 days to safeguard a deposit from the day he receives it. The landlord will have to provide the tenant prescribed information about the scheme safeguarding the deposit within these 14 days.

To avoid disputes having to go to the courts, both schemes will be supported by an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) service - although the use of this will not be compulsory

There is **NO** fee to join the Custodial Deposit Scheme, so this may be a preferred option for LLs.

JS stated that student accommodation was already at a higher cost than non-student rentals, to which a LL responded that upkeep/cleaning/wear & tear was also more expensive.

A LL suggested including details of the TDS in the Assured Shorthold Tenancy Agreement to show good practice. The SUAC agreement is being revised by solicitors, and new wording will include how Damage Deposit is protected. The expected time of return of DD after termination of the tenancy will be extended from 14 days to 28.

It was discussed after the meeting that prior to revising the AST agreement The SUAC will be circulating a discussion document to all registered LLs on clauses which they may favour having included in a revised AST. It is hoped that by consulting in this way that more LLs will use the SUAC AST.

JS informed the meeting that at the Housing Event it was stressed that at the end of a tenancy a property must be left clean, and preferably all tenants vacate at the same time. The SUAC do **NOT** advise students to retain the last month's rent against the DD.

HMO Update was also discussed with Alastair Emery. There had been 106 applications to Norwich City Council, with officers visiting some properties to carry out Risk Assessment.

At the last LL meeting Ellen Spencer had highlighted fire exit provision and the need for a separate corridor (exit through the kitchen or a converted sitting/dining room to a bedroom with the front door leading straight into it not acceptable). AE reported that NCC was in discussion with the Fire Officer regarding this problem – some houses do not lend themselves to building a corridor. A sprinkler system throughout the whole property was an alternative, although expensive. A LL suggested exit through a downstairs escape window. AE thought that may be acceptable. Alarms/smoke detectors are necessary in all habitable rooms and these must be mains operated with battery back-up or wireless – battery operated alone not sufficient. Sites of suppliers can be found on Google – (search for) wireless smoke detectors.

JS informed the meeting that some LLs had tried to avoid registration by closing off the third floor - making it out of bounds - and then converting the garage into an extra bedroom. This did not alter the fact that the property was 3-storeys. Basements and lofts also count as a storey if habitable, even if not let out or used.

A LL asked AE if site visits by NCC could be arranged if they had any compliance queries. He responded that usually any questions could be answered by telephone.

6. Advice Centre Issues

a) Rent Levels / Differential Rents for Rooms of Varying Size

A local survey had shown the average rental was between £200 - £250/month within the Golden Triangle, and this will be publicised for students. Supply and demand was fairly well balanced. JS suggested that LLs set different rents for different sized rooms within a property, thereby avoiding resentment between housemates. A LL pointed out that if a Joint and Severally Tenancy Agreement was signed this could not be enforced.

b) Tenancy Start and End Dates / Condition of Property on Uptake of Tenancy

Often start/end dates were on the same day, and if the exiting tenants left the property in an unsatisfactory condition it was unfair to incoming tenants. Sufficient time was required for cleaning/painting/remedial works in readiness for the new tenants. Increasing numbers of students/parents are more particular about accommodation and require a good standard.

One LL responded that Council Tax was still payable plus all utility bills, and that is why they ran concurrently. Another reported they photographed the property/rooms/furniture at the commencement of tenancy and told students that was the condition they expected the property to be left in when they vacated.

It was requested that at the Housing Event students be informed when looking at prospective houses to rent they should bear in mind that they were visiting whilst it was still home for the present tenants, and

that it would be in a clean, tidy condition for them to move in to. Another LL requested that students be reminded to ensure drains were cleaned/rubbish kept tidy to discourage rats.

c) Gas Certificates

JS reminded the meeting that these must run concurrently. Home Run sends courtesy reminder letters and there have been lapses of weeks and months. It is the LL's responsibility to ensure that certificates are up to date.

d) Head of Households / Bank Accounts

Some LLs requested tenants to appoint a HoH, with all monies paid to one bank account in that person's name. This is not good practice and could be open to abuse. Rents should be paid directly to the LL.

e) Registration for Housing Event

Home Run looked forward to receiving registration documents, and it would be helpful if these were sent ASAP, not left until the deadline. JS requested that LLs check all contact details are complete and correct and re-iterated that properties will only be registered on the database if Home Run has:

The appropriate fee
A valid CORGI gas certificate
A valid NICEIC electrical certificate.
A valid Council Tax bill, if relevant.

7. Landlords' Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 19.06.07 in the Hive, Union House. Please note we will be starting at 10H00 and hope to finish at approximately 12H30.

8. AOB

JS confirmed that students would be reminded at the Housing Event to telephone LLs if they expected to be late for or to cancel appointments, or to inform them they had found another property. It would also be stressed that students should not be pressured into signing agreements/paying deposits. However, if they see and must have a property, that would be the time to commit.

JS thanked all for attending.

JS/LTHH
27.03.07