

MINUTES OF THE LANDLORDS' MEETINGS

WEDNESDAY- 16 JUNE 2010 - 18:00

&

WEDNESDAY - 23 JUNE 2010 - 10:00

THE HIVE

16.06.10 - Those Present:

Brown, Jill	DoS	Langley, G	Popely, Diane	
Cunningham, Toby	SU	Langley, N	Pridmore, Ali	Citywide
Daly, Clare		Linnell, Carole	Shaw, Gaia	
Gill, Howard		Linnell, David	Spiro, Jo	SU
Grimer, Jacinta	Endsleigh	Lydia	Sutton, Allan	
Gudgin, J		Mackintosh, Bundy	Sutton, Penny	
Holmes, Peter		Martin, C	Sutton, Tom	SU
Ilsley, John		Nelson, Graham	Symonds, R	
Ives, Kathryn		Parker, Ian	Ter-Berg, Nikki	
Ives, Michael		Parker, Pam	Thompson, L	
Kelly, Jim		Popely, Barry	Wellingham, J	

The Meeting commenced at 18:10 and ended at 19:30.

23.06.10 - Those Present:

Anderson, Fiona		Cox, Helen	Nelson, Graham	NCC
Banthorpe, Kelly	Citywide	Cross, Janina	Parry, Enid	
Barnes, Marion		Evans, Jan	Ramjeet, Mohit	
Barnes, Peter		Green, Robin	Sherlock, Roy	
Barrett, John		Grimer, Jacinta	Spiro, Jo	SU
Brown, Richard		Hebditch, Rosemary	Smith, Emma	NCC
Calow, Nigel		Hudson, Lorna	Summers, David	
Catton, J		Langford, Kara	Summers, Janet	
Catton, V		Lydia		
Chase, Paul		Neale, P		

The Meeting commenced at 10:10 and ended at 11:50.

Apologies:

Brown, Carryl	Kearon, Sean	Sothisrihari, Mr
Dowding, Wendy	Kingwell, Mandy	Sothisrihari, Mrs
Gould, James	Matthews, Sally	Tovey, John
Hebditch, Suzanna	Parry, Andy	Tovey, Martha

1. Jo Spiro – Student Support Services Manager – Welcome

JS commenced the meetings by thanking all for attending. Colleague introductions were made and general housekeeping information given. Apologies that KL was not in attendance for 17.06.10 meeting.

2. UEA Accommodation – Update

See Attachment (a)

There are no changes since January, nor plans for expansion.

A LL asked how payments were made for UEA Accommodation. JS answered there was a variety of payment plans (monthly / termly); no requirement for advance payments or deposits. Any damage was charged to the student(s) directly at the time.

3. Home Run – Update

See Attachment (b) & (c)

There were a record number of properties registered – 557 (2304 bed spaces). The graphs showed a similarity to 2008 as many students stay in accommodation for two years.

The new website was a great improvement. Highlighted properties were those that had been submitted in full by the earlier deadline and appeared randomly before un-highlighted properties. At the time of launch there had been 4000+ visits to the website and 58,000 page views.

A LL asked for the percentage of highlighted properties – approximately 60% at the time of the list release.

Another requested having – distance from campus – as a search criterion. This can be looked into.

There was a further request to have properties flagged on a map.

JS explained that in response to student requests about different areas of Norwich, a video had been filmed called 'Where are We?' and was on the website.

LLs were re-assured now that exams were over that more students would be looking for housing and there would be another busy time at the start of the academic year.

Feedback from the Union Student Survey conducted in March / April 2010 was analysed and revealed that students wanted the Housing Fair / list release to be earlier – mid-January – the same time as agencies release their listings. If Home Run does not comply more students will go to agencies and it is in everyone's best interests that Home Run responds. A LL endorsed this fact. The start of term is 17 January 2011, and it was proposed that the Housing Fair run during that week, although this information should not be passed on to those outside of the meeting. Publication of the Housing Fair / list release would be more aggressive with advertisements in Concrete, Rabbit, posters, banners, on the website.

Renewing registration is much easier with the new website, and it would be helpful if LLs submit new certification when testing is done rather than wait until registration.

It is also important that the website is up to date and accurate, and LLs were once again asked to inform Home Run when a property was let. It was very frustrating for users to be told a property was not available when it was shown live on the website. A LL suggested having an 'Under Offer' tag.

Average rents (Home Run and agency) are £250 – 275 ppcm.

Also in response to the Union Student Survey feedback suggesting that students wanted more photographs on the website, Home Run will offer a photography service for LLs.

In May only 111 properties out of approx. 600 displayed photographs. These are let much quicker than those without. KL can be booked to visit properties, take approximately 10 photographs from which the LL can select up to 6 for display on line. The charge for this will be £50.00 per property. LLs must inform current tenants and arrange access. All photographs on the website will have a 'life' of 2 years with a cut-off date of October 2012, when all will be removed. (Since the meeting the fee was set at £35.00 per property.)

A LL suggested an on line facility to enlarge pictures. KL to investigate.

Autumn semester commences on 27 September 2010. Students will still be looking for accommodation now and up to early Autumn – including PGs October intake and January 2011 Occupational Health students. LLs could consider offering 6 month lets, single tenancies and shorter lets to meet different needs. Another point to bear in mind is that many students (approximately 33%) at UEA are local and live at home due to costs.

4. Graham Nelson – Head of Planning – Norwich City Council

NB In between the first meeting on 16/6 and the second on 23/6 the Government issued new guidance on planning. See end of paragraph for latest information.

See Attachment (d)

The new rules, which came into effect in April 2010, apply to all HMOs, not just student housing.

GN confirmed that there was no great problem with 'studentification' in Norwich.

Change of use planning application costs = £225, and extensive supporting information is required. The planning committee members comprise 90% NCC and 10% elected members. Guidance notes can be found at http://www.norwich.gov.uk/intranet_docs/A-Z/Planning%20service/Planning_obligations_guidance_note.pdf

GN stressed the importance of retaining records, should a planning complaint occur, and ensuring that permissions are sought as failure to do so may impact on insurance cover, etc.

The council is duty bound to investigate any complaint.

Please find below the change in guidance issued between meetings. For more information please see <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/housing/1708224>

The definition of a small HMO (the C4 use class) will remain and permitted development rights will be extended to allow all changes between the C4 and C3 classes without the need for planning applications. In areas where there is a need to control HMO development, local authorities will be able to use an Article 4 direction to remove these permitted development rights and require planning applications for such changes of use.

These proposals will mean that any change of use between dwelling houses and small HMOs will be able to happen without planning permission unless the local council believes there is problem with such development in a particular area. In these areas they will be able to use article 4 powers to require planning permission.

5. Jo Spiro – Advice Issues

Vacating premises / rubbish - All LLs should have received a letter from the Welfare Officer about how to dispose of waste and re-cycling. The same information has been issued to all students from the UEA Dean of Students. This is to encourage responsible disposal of rubbish at the end of tenancies to minimise negative affects on the community, keep complaints to a minimum and the neighbourhoods

happy. LLs should not expect tenants to dispose of the house's furniture and likewise tenants should not leave excessive rubbish for LLs to dispose of. However, ultimately it is the LL's responsibility to clear as waste could become a risk to public health. If LLs could pin up bin collection dates in the kitchens of properties this may alleviate the problem of accumulating rubbish – listings can be found on <http://www.norwich.gov.uk/webapps/awc/bincollectiondayfinder.asp>

Food waste collection bins were planned for introduction in October / November 2010.

If a property has 5+ people and the household is re-cycling properly a 360 litre bin can be requested.

JS reminded LLs that damage deposits must be protected in a scheme (preferably each deposit individually) and certificate details and ID number should be issued to tenants. She also thanked LLs for their understanding and assistance when housemates fall out.

Landlord of the Year Award – this is a new achievement award sponsored by commercial companies. The winner was nominated by HR tenants, to promote good LL practice. Last April Janine Crowcombe was announced the winner and her properties state this on the website. This award section is planned to continue in future years.

Proforma letters re. ASTs – these will be issued where unfair terms are found, referring to specific wording. All HR LLs are reminded that the Union of UEA Students AST is available to use.

Emma Smith (NCC) confirmed all HR LLs are passported to the Norwich City Council Accredited LL Scheme – one benefit is training (details will be forwarded via HR). A sample of properties could be inspected.

6. Questions & Answers

i) Citywide Services – Ali Pridmore & Kelly Banthorpe

A LL asked about charging students for disposal of their excess rubbish – this is legitimate if it is the tenants rubbish and the landlord has had to pay to dispose of it.

It was asked whether households could keep their bins permanently on the pavement – this was not acceptable and Citywide would impose a fixed penalty.

Discussion took place as to whether waste left by students was classified as domestic or commercial when taking it to a council site. Details can be found on http://www.norfolk.gov.uk/Environment/Waste_and_recycling/Recycling/Recycling_centres/index.htm and any queries can be emailed to info@norwich.gov.uk

ii) Endsleigh Insurance - Jacinta Grimer

Discounts were offered to LLs of student lets.

7. A O B

The viability of installing water meters in let properties was questioned – agreed probably only cost effective if there are one or 2 occupants.

8. Next Meeting – January 2011

For parking ease it is best to conduct meetings during the vacation period – provisionally Tuesday 11.01.11 evening and Thursday 13.01.11 morning. However, with the proposed earlier Housing Fair this may necessitate that the meeting be shelved until the Easter break. To be confirmed.

JS thanked all for attending.

July 2010