

**P-04-480 Address Private Sector Student Housing Standards –
Correspondence from the petitioner to the Committee,
02.07.2013**

Hello,

Thank you for sending this through and giving us the chance to add additional comments.

Here are the points we'd like to raise:

1) We'd like to thank the Housing Minister for sending back such a detailed letter addressing the issues in the report.

2) Administration Fees

Whilst we agree that they must be detailed upfront, some are not, and some are high in price. We feel there should be a maximum charge or no charge at all put into place to stop such practises. Shelter England have just launched a campaign to End Agency Fees, Scotland have already ended Agency Fees so we feel Wales should be following suit. This is something that was raised at the Renting Homes Bill consultation we attended in Aberystwyth on July 1st.

3) Tenancy Deposit Schemes

We feel this needs addressing as a lot of the casework we have had over the past few months have centred around people's deposits not being protected, not being put back in in full (but being negotiated with the landlord), receipts of work not being provided – we feel this should be considered in the Bill or separate work as an additional area of concern.

4) Condition Of Properties

- This is a long standing issue in Aberystwyth, and the reason we are being so persistent. Currently category 1 hazards like damp need to be addressed, but in a lot of the cases we see, they simply aren't – and it isn't enforced. The landlord can simply get away with providing poor accommodation as there**

appear to be not deterrents for them not to maintain their properties.

- We are concerned that whilst it's good to have sector standards in the bill, that a one-hat-fits-all-solution will not work for Aberystwyth, as we do not have the enforcement. Key things out of our consultation came about as: who will enforce it, what will the ramifications be if standards are not met, what will happen for the tenants?
- These new proposals will not come into practise until 2016 we're told – this doesn't address the issues that are happening now to students. We do agree they are needed, but we are worried about our students now who are living in these conditions, facing high rents for these and sub-par accommodation. We really feel that more work needs to be done here.
- Enforcement – this is where we feel we are lacking in Aberystwyth. I will give an example of a common case we have:
- Student presents themselves to us. They are living in damp conditions and things that are broken have not been repaired. They have had difficulty communicating with their landlord who has not consulted on when they will address the conditions. We check if the property is on the HMO Register. (Often not with these cases) We phone the council to ask, the house is not on there. They send out an officer to inspect. The landlord applies for a license. The tenants take pictures of the property and the officer issues a schedule of works. Landlord promises to address issues, either does cheaply or addresses a couple. Tenants complain again. Tenants move out and have issues getting their deposits back (which turn out not to be protected) – repeat cycle.
- The sort of practises above should not be in the volume they are. There should not be such poor quality accommodation and treatment of students.

- Aberystwyth is market-led and prices and standards are a major concern. There needs to be more done, and it just isn't happening, and our students feel let down by the systems in place. This is why we are so persistent and want the Welsh Assembly to take a lead on it, be more proactive and come and find out the conditions and practises we are talking about first hand.
- Currently, under licensing regs in Aber, properties are only inspected once every 5 years. Which seems ridiculous considering the conditions and complaints.
- We also wanted to support the idea of the tenant information pack – fantastic idea and much needed and we want to help out (Nus too hopefully as they have a lot of good work on housing) wherever we can.

5) Consultation

- Following on from the condition of properties, we feel the volume of cases we see, the poor experiences students have and the lack of repercussions for landlords (since we are repeatedly reporting some offenders and unlicensed properties are somehow okay once someone has applied for a license (not for the students who are living there)) and they are given a lot of leeway to do work/no real repercussion for not doing the work, and new students move in and seemingly the case is closed. My theory is you wouldn't let someone drive a car if they've just applied for a license, so why let them have tenants if they are unlicensed and haven't been properly checked out.
- There are 3 stakeholder events, lasting 2 hours each for such a serious consultation, so while I thank the minister for putting on these, we found in our event that the time wasn't long enough to start a discussion, especially in a place like Aberystwyth, which (it arose from the consultation) has some of the worst private sector standards in Wales. We would like

to see further consultation to address the practises which are going on here, and provide reassurance to the students that enforcement will be taken and that standards in the private sector will be taken seriously.

- We are currently sending out a new housing survey which goes into far more detail on Housing.
- While housing is in the spotlight, we feel this is the best opportunity for issues to be addressed and support to be given.
- We can't see the number of housing cases (over 100 separate cases) coming through our doors as Aberystwyth is not resourced for it. We worry our local authority is not given enough resourcing to serve the number of cases we have – 2 officers covering Aberystwyth with the volume of cases we see (and then the students who are accepting bad conditions as a norm).

Therefore, to conclude on consultation we would like to see far more work done, due to the number of people affected, the standards of properties decreasing, the lack of enforcement or indeed work on these properties and the repeated perpetrators being able to consistently get away with it.

Many thanks for letting us respond :D

Laura