

Appendix Two – Action Plan

Introduction

The WSA report contains four recommendations. These are set out below with the proposed way forward outlined for each recommendation.

Recommendation One

WDC to lead on establishing an accreditation system or Kitemark award for landlords that would measure a range of factors and be an incentive for good landlords to demonstrate they are meeting all the agreed criteria. The criteria should be developed in partnership with the Landlords Forum and the wider community and is likely to include standards of housing, the provision of bins and waste collection, the level of information provided for tenants and the relationships landlords maintain with neighbours. WDC could set up the system, work with the Landlord Forum to engage landlords in it and monitor the performance of each landlord. This would positively reward good landlords and, having interviewed landlords as part of this process, we felt there was some clear good practice to share. Individual accreditations and performance indicators could be publicised on the WDC website. Based on the Kitemark standards, WDC should consider providing written guidance specifically for student landlords and estate agents, preferably available online.

Response:

This recommendation is accepted in principle but it will require further work to fully consider what the benefits of the Council operating a practical accreditation scheme are, or whether existing accreditation schemes would be more appropriate. Work will involve legal advice as to the requirements for such a scheme, researching other successful schemes to incorporate any learning from those, and an assessment of the resources required to deliver the scheme. A proposal can then be put together and taken to Executive for approval and, if necessary, to request additional funding/staffing resources.

The timescale will need to reflect the “purdah” period for the local elections which commences in March. The proposal will therefore be brought to a meeting of the Executive following the elections.

Recommendation Two

WDC to take responsibility, in the first instance, for the establishment and provision of a regular specific forum. The focus of this would be to continue to have some of the discussions highlighted through this community engagement process by bringing together a wide range of stakeholders. This should include members of the wider community, students, councillors and council officers, representatives of UoW and Warwick Student Union, landlords and the community and voluntary sector. Such a forum would be most effective if it were convened at least on a quarterly basis and it would be useful for it to be facilitated independently to help ease potential tensions and negative dynamics. It would need to be focused and have a clear brief and action plan where progress around issues can be agreed and measured.

Response:

This proposal could be considered as part of a wider communication plan to include and address the points raised in recommendation four.

Recommendation Three

We recommend that UoW funds a suitably qualified and experienced Housing Outreach Officer who would work for the Student Union and be based in Leamington. This could be a similar initiative to the one funded in Coventry by the university already. The role would ensure students were well informed about available local services, safety regulations, procedures and community activities. The officer could also ensure that students are aware of their rights and responsibilities concerning landlords and housing in general and support them in exercising these rights. The officer could contribute to data collection about the activities of landlords in Leamington and be authorised to enable the inspection of privately owned properties to identify substandard properties and any environmental issues. The role could also include encouraging landlords to be accredited by the Kitemark scheme.

Response:

This recommendation is accepted in principle. Discussions have taken place with the University of Warwick and they have indicated that they are happy to fund a pilot project initially. The precise nature of the role, the employment arrangements, duties, reporting lines, timescales and starting date (see below) will need further work and will need to be agreed with the University of Warwick. For the officer to be formally authorised to inspect privately owned properties it will probably require them to be an employee of the local authority rather than the Students' Union.

Work on this can begin immediately but as regards timescales it would work best if we aim to commence the project for the next academic year given that the current year ends around June/July. To aim to have someone recruited and fully trained in time for the start of summer term would be rushed and it doesn't appear efficient given that, within a few weeks, it will be the summer vacation period when there are very few students around.

It would seem to be a more effective use of the resource to recruit and have the officer starting in post by early summer, allowing for a comprehensive training and familiarisation programme over the summer months so that they are ready to deliver the service at the beginning of the new academic year in September.

Recommendation Four

Communication should be revised and developed with students as well as members of the wider community. For students this could include the Student Union updating the information they provide to students on renting and landlords; building on current work to ensure that information about living in Leamington is drip fed to students throughout the year, via social media. The Student Union should also consider setting up and managing a specific 'Warwick Students Living in the Local Community' Facebook page. For the wider community both WDC and UoW should consider establishing a central point of contact for residents who have complaints or issues concerning UoW students. WDC could provide and publicise guidance for residents on how to make enquiries and complaints concerning issues caused by students. The South Leamington Area Residents Group has already put together useful advice around this that could be the basis of such guidance with the group's permission. WDC could also provide more information to local residents on HMO planning and

licensing, for example regulations and consequences of regulations being breached, in an accessible manner.

Response:

This recommendation is accepted in principle. However it clearly requires a number of other organisations to agree to deliver various aspects of it. It is therefore proposed that a working group of the relevant stakeholders be set up to develop a comprehensive communication plan that reflects all of the ideas and thinking behind recommendations two and four.

If the plan requires additional resources to deliver elements of it a report will be taken to Executive requesting funding.

It is considered that the plan could be ready for implementation by early May. However again it may be that some of the initiatives could have the greatest benefit if they coincided with the start of the next academic year when a new cohort of students will be moving into the community. Timescales will therefore be explicitly considered for each initiative within the plan and may be different for different activities.