



**Brighton & Hove
City Council**

**CABINET
ADDENDUM
ITEM 204(a) ADDITIONAL
APPENDICES**

4.00PM, THURSDAY, 23 APRIL 2009

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

ADDENDUM

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204. REPORTS FROM OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEES	
a) Students in the Community	1 - 12
Report of the Acting Director of Strategy & Governance (copy circulated separately).	

Dear Kath,

I am responding to your letter of 12th March and your invitation to comment on the recommendations.

First, I would like to say that the University welcomes the study and was pleased to be engaged in the process.

As a general comment we feel it lacks a clear strategy for engagement with private sector landlords. We have no wish to alienate them but we feel the report needs greater clarity in terms of vision and the direction of engagement with them.

More specifically:

1) Rec.13 We do not have a dedicated Community Liaison Officer but we have trained individuals who can mediate and deal with any complaints or problems as they arise. We work closely with the University of Brighton to ensure we engage with students from our respective institutions. However, we accept that this is an area of activity that could be strengthened and is under review.

2) Rec.19- needs more detail. Off campus University owned or managed housing is not a problem but more thought needs to be given if broadening the strategy to the private sector. Again, it comes back to the role and responsibility of landlords and agents.

3) Rec.20- the University has a no car policy in student residences and as part of our Transport Plan we encourage use of public transport. We also have a very high percentage of cyclists, indeed one of the highest percentages in the sector. City transport strategy needs to focus on areas which are currently poorly served and could be improved to encourage dispersal of student housing.

4)Rec. 24- it should not be assumed that all developments are linked to expansion. Part of our strategy is to replace and update existing buildings which should not be related to commensurate increases in bed spaces.

5)Rec.26- does this need rewording? Is this saying that the Government should support the City Council in adding students in the City to the list of housing priorities?

6) Rec.37- in our experience we have not always been invited to LAT and Residents' Committee meetings. We are happy to be in attendance

The primary message is that we are more than willing to engage with the City Council and other partners on the issues raised in the report and in implementing the recommendations.

Please call if you have any queries.

Regards,

Charles

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University of Brighton



Director of Finance
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Ref: SMH/LMF

9 April 2009

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Dear Councillor Meadows

**Adult Social Care and Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Scrutiny Report – Students in the Community**

I am responding to your letter dated 12th March addressed to Mr David House, enclosing a copy of the above report. I am responding on behalf of the University as I have overall responsibility for student housing and community liaison.

The University has been pleased to participate in the Scrutiny exercise and welcomes the opportunity to play a part in improving community relations. The Scrutiny exercise has very helpfully highlighted linkages between the activities of all the agencies involved in supporting good community relations and changes that could improve the overall impact of these activities. Responses in relation to each of the recommendations for University of Brighton are set out below:

Recommendation 6 – SShh campaign

We will work with the Students' Union to ensure the benefits of the SShh campaign are maximised on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation 7 – street noise

This is a very difficult area as young people making noise in the street may or may not be our students and the level of disturbance may not justify police attendance. However, the University works closely with Sussex Police and will take forward discussions, along with the Students' Union, to see what further action can be taken.

Recommendation 8 – Phoenix Halls podium

We are progressing the formation of a smoking shelter adjacent to C block at Phoenix Halls.

Recommendation 9 – Phoenix Halls windows and signage

In response to the report, students have been asked by halls staff to close windows when playing music at night. Notices have also been placed in Kitchens to remind students to shut windows. More visible signage in relation to noise is in the process of being installed across the site.

Recommendation 10 – staffing resources in halls

A review of current staffing arrangements is planned. We have already invested in relocating the reception and entrance at Phoenix to enable a clearer view of the entrance and front of Southover Street.

Recommendation 11 – tree and bush planting at Phoenix Halls

This is being actively investigated. There will be some restrictions on planting on the podium due to maintenance issues.

Recommendation 12 – planning for future halls and noise impact

We will ensure that the impact of the smoking ban and other noise issues is taken into account in new developments.

Recommendation 19 – clean up days

We will take forward discussions on this in conjunction with the Students' Union and Sussex University.

Recommendation 20 – promotion of public transport to students

We already include this information in our halls accommodation guides and will extend to publications aimed at students living in the private sector for the next issue. We are currently working on a university wide travel plan and aim to have this in place for the start of the next academic year. This will include provision for initiatives to reduce use of cars by our staff and students.

Recommendation 28 –affordable accommodation in halls

Our halls offer a range of prices, the lowest being under £70 per week in some blocks at Varley. We will consider incorporating low cost rooms within new halls developments.

Recommendation 29 – halls accommodation for second and third years

We wish to see a significant expansion of our current halls accommodation. Our first priority is to ensure we can offer places to all first year students; but would ideally wish to see sufficient to offer places to second and third year students. We are working on proposals to redevelop the Varley halls site to provide additional accommodation (with a first phase of new accommodation planned for September 2011). We are also progressing discussions about a number of other sites for halls development in the City.

Recommendation 30 – directly managed properties

The Accommodation Team is working to expand the portfolio of directly managed properties.

Recommendation 33 – Student Working Group

The University will be pleased to participate in a Student Working Group. We are already involved in a number of joint working groups across the city and it may be that these could form the basis of the new group.

Recommendation 36 – student volunteering

We are supportive of promoting student volunteering.

Recommendation 37 – student attendance at LATs

We encourage students to attend LATS along with the Community Liaison Officer.

I hope you will see from this response that the University of Brighton is keen to work with the City Council and other agencies to promote good community relations. I would be very happy to meet with you in order to discuss the recommendations and our responses further.

Yours sincerely



Sue McHugh
Director of Finance

cc David House, Deputy Vice-Chancellor
Kevin Mannall, Community Liaison Officer

Dear Anne,

Thank you for sending the University of Sussex Students' Union the findings of the investigative panel.

The Students' Union welcomes joint workings between the Police, universities, and students unions, particularly because the safety of our students is of paramount concern to us. We do have concerns, though, with regards to the suggestion that the Sshh Campaign be extended. Because the University of Sussex doesn't have halls of residence outside of campus, we feel that there are more constructive ways to encourage students to be good neighbours. We are planning to run a 'good neighbour' campaign in the upcoming term, and hope that this will contribute to the positive work we are attempting to do within the community.

We also appreciate the recommendations made under 'Refuse and Recycling,' including initiatives by the Council working together with the university to inform students about changes in collection dates, etc. We would very much like to see the Council taking a lead role in tackling the issue of 'fly-tipping' and would be happy to publicise the information to our students.

We particularly appreciate the recognition of the duty of landlords and letting agents, with special reference to the proposal of extending the accreditation scheme. The Students' Union ran a Rate Your Landlord survey last term, and we hope that once the results are published into an executive summary, the Council would take the opportunity to look at students' own experiences of living in Brighton. While the option was made available for students to attend the panel hearings, the location and timing meant that very few students outside of the Students' Union were able to be present.

Finally, we are very enthusiastic about potential partnership working, and would very much like to see the University Working Group re-established. While it only held a few meetings, they were by and large very constructive, with a fresh approach to students and the community. If you have any questions or would like to discuss anything, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Kind Regards,

Richa Kaul Padte, Welfare Officer
[On behalf of Laura Tazzioli and the University of Sussex Students' Union]

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University of Brighton Students' Union

Comments and response to Scrutiny Report – Students in the Community, February 2009

The University of Brighton Students' Union would like to firstly thank the Council for devoting such time and resources to what we believe is a very important topic and for acknowledging that whilst requests and suggestions can be made to us that we are ultimately a democratic body. Therefore, any actions that we may take as a result of the Scrutiny Report would have to be approved by our Union Council. Nevertheless the issue of students in the community is important to us and one we are committed to working upon.

To make this response easier to read alongside the report it will cover issues in the same order and pick out those recommendations relating to the Students' Union. We must also stress that this is a response from the University of Brighton Students' Union and not the University itself so anything commented upon below is the Union's opinion and not reflective of the University's position.

Noise Nuisance

Recommendation 6 – As a community initiative we would have no problem developing the SSHH campaign alongside community groups. Running a campaign such as this requires funding. The Union would not be able to fund a much larger campaign than it already does. Would there be any fund for joint campaigns between the Union and the Council? Extra money for such a campaign could see it publicised in many more public places, rather than just through student advertising, which would raise its profile remarkably.

Recommendation 7 – As far as addressing street noise nuisance in residential areas goes there is not too much we can do other than raise awareness amongst students that it is a problem and encourage them to keep quiet. This is currently done through the SSHH campaign and obviously if this campaign were to grow then we'd hope to see a decrease in the number of students causing street noise nuisance.

As a Students' Union all we could do is encourage students to be more respectful, we cannot punish those causing street noise nuisance as much of the time there is no identifiable culprit other than the generic 'students'. We would also like to ask what the council is looking to do about street noise caused by those other than students.

Refuse and Recycling

Cutting across a few of the recommendations in this section the Union would suggest giving out information, such as collection day information, at target times of year. As has been highlighted, students are transitory tenants, potentially moving once a year. Now whilst, due to the nature of the beast, there is no set time for students to move into a property it is usually safe to assume that they will be in by the first week of the new academic year. Therefore it would be our suggestion that any information drops are targeted at this time of year as any earlier may mean that previous tenants lose information or take it with them. Any later and problems may have already arisen.

Recommendation 17 – Point of clarification for us, in this recommendation do you mean Universities (as stated) or Students' Unions?

Recommendation 18 – Looking at the list of options supplied under the main report in reference to this recommendation the Union would like to stress that the first on the list is unfavourable. Students moving into a new house, possibly with no past experience of living independently, often make mistakes or are unsure of how to get rid of bulky waste. Sometimes students may be told by landlords to leave bulky waste outside houses to be dealt with by others. That is just a couple of examples but there other reasons why it would sometimes be unfair to bring enforcement cases against students. The three options which follow the first are a lot more favourable and the Union would more-than-likely offer support to them.

Recommendation 19 – The Union feels that this is a good recommendation and is one that we will look into for the new academic year 2009/2010.

Car Parking

Recommendation 20 – Whilst acknowledging that the use of public transport is a much more desirable mode of transport, not just for parking issues but also for the environment, there are issues concerned here. The first and foremost of these is the price of the city's public transport. For many students it is cheaper to drive their cars than it is for them to get the bus every day, especially when many of them will car pool. The Big Lemon bus is more reasonably priced but due to its inability to compete with Brighton and Hove Bus Company the service is not regular enough for many students.

It would be a lot easier to encourage students to leave their cars at home and use public transport if it were more affordable. While there is money to be saved by getting bus passes in advance it could also be useful if students were to make a saving on the bus by showing their student cards when they got on, that way if students had failed to buy in advance they still might be encouraged to use public transport.

A joint campaign promoting the use of bicycles might also be useful in respect of this recommendation, especially as Brighton has a good cycle lane network.

Council Tax

Recommendation 23 – The Students' Union would be happy to support the options put forward in the main report relating to this recommendation.

Planning Policies

Recommendation 24 – The Students' Union would wish to be involved in any discussions on the control of student housing in the city and would hope to be parlay to the discussion of any developments concerning the introduction of any controls.

Recommendation 25 (Main report information) – In relation to the development of conservatories in properties to free up additional bedroom space the Union, like residents, would similarly like to express its concern that no action can be taken to prevent this happening.

Recommendation 27 – The Union would like to voice its support for the development of halls of residence. Being able to live in halls of residence in your first year at University enhances the student experience and for many provides a good transition year between living at home and living independently.

Provision of Halls of Residence

Recommendation 28 – The Union can have a conversation with the University regarding this.

Student Landlord Issues

Recommendation 31 – The Union would support and encourage the development of such an accreditation scheme.

Partnership Working and Communications

Recommendation 33 – We feel that the development of such a group is a fantastic step forward and can only bring benefits with it and therefore would be more than happy to be part of it.

Recommendation 34 - We would also be interested in helping to develop a city wide information pack and hope that this information would have a large focus on the mere promotion of neighbourly ties and the benefits that getting to know your neighbours can bring. We feel that there are many benefits to be achieved through a joint University/Union/Council venture such as this.

One query that we do have about the group is as to whether or not it would be afforded a budget? It would obviously be very difficult for the group to produce meaningful work and outcomes if it had no money with which to do so.

Positive Impact of Students to Local Community

Recommendation 36 – The Students' Union are engaged in furthering volunteerism at the University. It might be nice to see the council making more news out of the volunteering done by students across the city, especially in light of the recent Times Higher Award received by the University's Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP) for '*Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community*'

Recommendation 37 – We are looking to promote student attendance at LATs.

Conclusions

The University of Brighton Students' Union would like to again reiterate thanks to the Council for approaching such an important matter and producing a report that has many positive aspects and could see great improvements across the city if many of the recommendations are carried out.

In future it would be useful to be able to sit down and discuss similar reports before they go to the Cabinet but we are aware that this Scrutiny programme has been the first of its kind and as such has still been a success.

We hope that this response and comments to the Scrutiny Report prove useful.

SF – 08/04/2009