

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