

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

**ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND HOUSING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AD HOC
PANEL -STUDENTS IN THE COMMUNITY**

2.00pm 7 NOVEMBER 2008

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Meadows (Chairman), Janio and Wrighton

PART ONE

6. Procedural Business (copy attached).

6a Declarations of Interest

6.1 There were none.

6b Exclusions of Press and Public

6.2 In accordance with section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, it was considered whether the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of any items contained in the agenda, having regard to the nature of the business to be transacted and the nature of the proceedings and the likelihood as to whether, if members of the press and public were present, there would be disclosure to them of confidential or exempt information as defined in section 100I (1) of the said Act.

6.3 **RESOLVED** – That the press and public be not excluded from the meeting.

7. Minutes of Previous Meeting

7.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 17.10.08 were approved as an accurate record.

8. Chairman's Communications

8.1 The Chairman informed members that future meetings of the ad hoc panel would be held in Brighton Town Hall, to allow for wider public access. An additional meeting of the panel has been scheduled for 05 December 2008.

9. Evidence Gathering

9.1 The panel heard from a number of witnesses.

9.2 Evidence from Dr Darren Smith, Reader in Geography, University of Brighton and from Jo Sage, University of Brighton

- a) Dr Smith and Ms Sage introduced themselves, explaining that they had studied the impact of increasing student numbers on a number of cities.
- b) In answer to a question regarding student/resident 'charters', the panel was told that these charters had been trialled in several locations, including Leeds, Nottingham and Loughborough. Such schemes could be difficult to implement as they required consistent engagement from Student Unions, something which was hard to guarantee, given the high turnover of Student Union officers. However, students are typically under-presented on residents group and associations, and any work which encourages greater engagement should be welcomed.
- c) In response to a query concerning the concentration of student households in the city, members were told that the situation was very fluid. Mapping from 2002-2007 showed the greatest concentration in the 'traditional' student areas of Hanover, Hartington Rd and Moulescoomb. Recent years have seen significant numbers of students around London Road station and in Regency Ward, with future movements into Hollingdean anticipated.
- d) Members were told this fluidity in student housing was not entirely due to the market expanding; there were also 'fashions' within the market, with some areas of the city seeing an expansion in the number of student households and others a contraction.

This was a very significant issue, as it was not necessarily clear whether former student housing tended to revert to family use or whether it stayed in the private rented sector (e.g. let to 'young professionals'). In the latter instance, the impact of student housing on family housing on the city might be considerably greater than in the former.

Members were informed that, in some other parts of the country such as Leeds, an expansion of student housing in one area of a city (e.g. from newly built Halls of Residence) had seen a matching reduction in the private rented sector for students, but little or no improvement in the availability of family housing, as the great majority of former student housing had been re-targeted at the young professional sector rather than at families.

- e) In answer to a question concerning the relationship between student numbers and national economic performance, the panel was told that the relationship was very complex. However, even if student numbers fell nationally as a result of an economic downturn (and this was by no means guaranteed), 'de-studentification' of Brighton & Hove was unlikely, as the city was considered a particularly attractive destination for students. Recent estimates for both the University of

Brighton and the University of Sussex saw stable or rising student figures until at least 2015.

- f) In response to queries about Planning issues, members were informed that there was currently no requirement to report or obtain permission for plans to convert family accommodation for student use (unless the accommodation in question was designated a 'Home in Multiple Occupation' – an 'HMO'). Although there was widespread support for the notion of introducing some kind of 'class order' for such changes of use, this could not apply retrospectively, so even if it was to be introduced, it would apply to only a small percentage of student housing.

Members were told that a more realistic approach to the issue might be to ensure that all existing management techniques were being employed efficiently in order to manage particular areas of city housing.

- g) In answer to a question regarding negative student perceptions of areas such as Bevendean and Moulescoomb, members were informed that such perceptions may have originated from surveys undertaken in 2002, when there was relatively little student housing in either area. In recent years, student concentration in Bevendean and Moulescoomb has increased considerably, and perceptions have changed for the better.

Members were also told that, in recent years, students had begun to favour proximity to their place of study above proximity to city centres, so this might also lead to improved perceptions of these suburban areas.

- h) In response to questions about student Halls of Residence, the panel was told that a recent University of Brighton Needs Assessment identified 90% of 1st year students preferring Halls to the private rented sector, with up to 20% of returning students also expressing a preference for Halls. Similar figures could probably be assumed for the University of Sussex.

Members were advised that if there were sufficient capacity for this volume of students in attractively sited Halls of Residence, there could be a very significant impact upon the private rented sector in the city.

9.3 Evidence from Kevin Mannall, Community Liaison Officer, University of Brighton

- a) In response to a question concerning what the University of Brighton did to ensure that its students were aware of appropriate behaviour, members were told that this was covered in the compulsory induction for all first year students. Printed guides were also available, and the Student Union was extensively involved with this issue.
- b) Members were informed that a joint council/University of Brighton information pack for students would be useful, particularly if landlords/letting agents were encouraged to distribute it (as many students take up accommodation in advance of their university induction, meaning that landlords are a better initial contact than universities or student unions).

- c) In answer to a question about accessing student addresses, Mr Mannall told members that he did not have direct access to students' address details, although he could often confirm which students lived at which addresses by informal means.
- d) Mr Mannall told members that the majority of his time was not spent in dealing with complaints about students, but with liaising with a variety of city agencies. Mr Mannall noted that he had received very positive feedback from city organisations, glad that they had a liaison officer to deal with.

9.4 Evidence from Simon Newell, Head of Partnerships and External Relations, Brighton & Hove City Council

- a) Mr Newell explained aspects of the role of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) and of the city Strategic Housing Partnership (SHP) and gave members some background as to what the SHP had done in terms of examining the issue of studentification. Mr Newell noted that the LSP and SHP brought key city partners together and facilitated high level discussion of issues; consequent practical measures would typically be taken by individual partner organisations rather than by the strategic partnerships themselves.
- b) Mr Newell noted that the LSP focused on the overall impact the city's universities had, not just upon any negative aspects of studentification.
- c) Mr Newell was asked to provide some examples of actions arising from the SHP's work. Mr Newell offered to produce a briefing paper for the panel.

9.5 Evidence from Martin Reid, Head of Housing Strategy and Private Sector Housing, Brighton & Hove City Council

- a) In response to a question regarding Homes in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), the panel was told that the legislation governing HMOs was quite restrictive, both in terms of defining an HMO (a property of more than two storeys and/or housing more than 5 people not living together as a single household), and in terms of the powers it granted to local authorities (which tended to focus on ensuring the quality of accommodation provided by HMOs rather than on managing their impact upon the local community).
- b) In answer to a query as to whether more Student Halls of Residence were required, members were told that this was an issue currently being examined by the Strategic Housing Partnership (SHP). The issue was not a simple one, as Halls could themselves impact upon the local community and it was not necessarily the case that increasing the number of places available in Halls would mean that an equivalent amount of private sector student housing was returned to more 'desirable' uses such as family housing.
- c) In response to a question on landlord accreditation schemes, members were told that these could be useful, but that most city landlords already provided good quality accommodation. This situation might perhaps be best improved by closer

co-working with the universities and by greater encouragement of university 'head-leasing' rather than via formal accreditation schemes. In any case, the ultimate guarantor of housing quality was demand: if demand for a particular kind of housing outstripped supply, then accreditation could never be wholly effective, as non-accredited landlords would still find customers.

9.6 Evidence from Paul Allen, Director of ebndc, Head of Neighbourhood Management, Brighton & Hove City Council

- a) Mr Allen stressed the positive contribution that the city's universities and their students made to local communities, much of which went relatively unheralded.
- b) Mr Allen noted that both city universities were heavily involved in community work, although he had less direct work undertaken by the University of Sussex than by the University of Brighton.
- c) Mr Allen told the panel that it was his understanding that the University of Sussex was considering introducing a compulsory element of community engagement into its undergraduate degree courses.

9.7 Evidence from Members of the Public

The panel heard additional evidence from members of the public attending the meeting.

- a) **Mr Richard Scott**, a city resident, directed the panel's attention to the issue of the availability of city private rented sector accommodation for young people who were not students, noting that competition from students could drive rents beyond the reaches of many young working people, and that the conversion of bedsits into (more expensive) studio flats could exacerbate this problem.
- b) Mr Scott also noted that the ongoing scrutiny review into Dual Diagnosis (of mental health and substance misuse problems) had addressed housing issues, and that the work of the two panels might usefully be co-ordinated.
- c) **Mr Mike Stimpson**, a city resident and landlord, informed the panel that there was in fact no legal or planning reason why student accommodation should not revert back to family use.
- d) Mr Stimpson also queried whether the problem of studentification was really as major as was being supposed, noting that some research had suggested the problem was concentrated in a few localised areas rather than being a broader urban issue.
- e) In addition, Mr Stimpson questioned whether useful comparisons could really be made between Brighton & Hove and large cities such as Leeds and Nottingham where there was typically a citywide oversupply of housing.

- f) The Chairman responded to Mt Stimpson's first point (9.7(c) above), explaining that references by witnesses and panel members to student housing not reverting to family use referred to an observed tendency, on average, for such use not to revert, rather than to any legislative bar on such a reversion.
- g) Dr Darren Smith challenged Mr Stimpson's assertions (in 9.7(d) and 9.7(e) above), arguing that the evidence Mr Stimpson had quoted on studentification was based on 2001 census data which was insufficiently sensitive and which largely pre-dated the rapid growth of student numbers in Brighton & Hove and many other cities. Dr Smith also noted that while it was true that direct comparisons of Brighton & Hove with much larger Northern cities were of limited value, a good deal of work had been done on the impact of students on comparator towns and cities such as Loughborough, Bath and Canterbury.

9.8 The Chairman thanked all the witnesses for their contributions.

10. Future Meetings

- 10.1 The Panel plans to hold additional meetings in public on 21 November and 5 December. Witnesses at these sessions may include officers from Brighton and Sussex Universities; officers of the City Council (including senior officers from CityClean and planning); police officers; city landlords and representatives of student letting agencies.

The meeting concluded at 4.00pm

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of