

Subject:	Student Rent Strikes & Accommodation. Items referred from the Council meeting held on the 25 March 2021		
Date of Meeting:	23 June 2021		
Report of:	Executive Lead Officer for Strategy, Governance & Law		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Mark Wall	Tel: 01273 291006
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Wards Affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:**

- 1.1 To receive the following deputation which has been referred from the full Council meeting held on the 25 March 2021 for consideration.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Committee responds to the deputation either by noting it or where it is considered more appropriate, calls for an officer report on the matter which may give consideration to a range of options and writes to the deputation spokesperson setting out the committee's decision(s).

3. CONTEXT / BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 To receive the following deputation along with the extract from the council meeting which is detailed in appendix 1:

(4) Deputation concerning Student Rent Strikes and Student Accommodation
Spokesperson Billie Krish

This written summary is submitted in support of our deputation concerning student rent strikes and private student accommodation in Brighton & Hove.

We wish to raise your urgent attention to the specific situation facing students in halls of residence at the University of Sussex and the University of Brighton, as well as students with private landlords in our city.

Summary of events:

Council will be well aware that in the run up to the 2020/21 academic year, students across the country were encouraged to come to campuses and into private student accommodation on the promise of proper teaching programmes, delivered in person as far as possible. Council will also be aware that the Government released guidance just days before term which tossed these plans out of the window and resulted in thousands of students being misled into accommodation where they were more at risk of COVID-19, more likely to be isolated and face challenges to their mental health and where they would have to pay

already unfair and extortionate rents but for accommodation which they did not require and for many, which they would actually be advised against taking up residence in.

Here in Brighton & Hove and following a lack of action from management at the University of Sussex to remedy the financial and welfare concerns of students, the Sussex Renters Union publicly called for a rent strike in December 2020.

The Sussex Renters Union has a list of six demands, some which include: allowing students to exit their tenancy contracts without penalty, a fifty percent rent reduction for the academic year and no COVID-19 job losses on campus. Sussex Renters Union voices concern towards the University of Sussex's decision to increase rents for students in halls for the next academic year. This is in addition to the removal of Park Village, a £95 a week accommodation, leaving the next most affordable accommodation - Norwich House - at £118.50 a week. We believe the lack of affordability may drive some students away from living on campus. Sussex Renters Union was pivotal in applying pressure onto the University for a rent rebate for the 2021 lockdown period. However, we are petitioning for it to be applied to all students universally. Students have also faced a range of accommodation issues including mould, damp walls and ceilings, leaks, silverfish and rats. The slow response of the University to these issues has led to many students living in unbecoming conditions.

We ask the council to consider:

- What steps it may take in calling on the University of Sussex to maintain recent engagement and the University of Brighton to begin similar cooperation with student rent strikers.
- Requesting the appropriate persons at the council to write to the Minister of State for Universities demanding full and proper financial support for students, to call on universities to cancel rents and provide the necessary financial support our universities require so they need not exploit students in order to survive.
- Bringing a motion (similar to that already brought before Bristol City Council) requesting the appropriate persons write to student landlords and accommodation providers in Brighton & Hove imploring them to take advantage of Government aid that would enable rent reductions and contract releases for students in private accommodation who have not been in occupation during this lockdown.
- Referring this deputation to the Housing Committee for further consideration.

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

COUNCIL

4.30pm 25 MARCH 2021

VIRTUAL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Robins (Chair), Mears (Deputy Chair), Allcock, Appich, Atkinson, Bagaeen, Barnett, Bell, Brennan, Brown, Childs, Clare, Davis, Deane, Druitt, Ebel, Evans, Fishleigh, Fowler, Gibson, Grimshaw, Hamilton, Heley, Henry, Hills, Hugh-Jones, Janio, Knight, Lewry, Littman, Lloyd, Mac Cafferty, McNair, Miller, Moonan, Nemeth, Nield, O'Quinn, Osborne, Peltzer Dunn, Phillips, Pissaridou, Platts, Powell, Rainey, Shanks, Simson, C Theobald, West, Wilkinson, Williams and Yates.

PART ONE

121 DEPUTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

(4) STUDENT RENT STRIKES AND STUDENT ACCOMMODATION

- 121.1 The Mayor reported that five deputations had been received from members of the public and that he would invite the spokespersons to introduce their deputation and for the relevant Chair to respond. He noted that 15 minutes were set aside for the consideration of deputations.
- 121.13 The Mayor noted that the fifteen minutes set aside for the consideration of deputations had been reached and therefore the remaining three deputations would be referred directly to the appropriate committee for consideration.

