

Dear Non-University Purpose-Built Student Accommodation Providers and Houses of Multiple Occupancy,

As lead representatives of Brighton Students' Union, we believe, as always, it is our duty to protect the over 20,000 students we serve during this unsettling time in relation to the developing COVID-19 situation and its impact on accommodation rent payments. Up and down the country, students have been returning home in increasing numbers due to guidance issued by the Government and their University. In doing so they have rightly prioritised their personal safety and protected the national interest, yet they now find themselves facing great uncertainty with their rent payments. It is wholly unjust for them to be financially penalised for carrying out their civic duty and therefore save lives. The relationship we have with the wider community is one we take very seriously, and we value these ties. You undoubtedly play a critical role in the area's residential ecosystem and we ask you to join us in supporting our students by showing flexibility in residential contracts for those in privately run Purpose-Built Student Accommodation (PBSA) and Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs).

We firmly believe students should not harbour the financial burden as the responsibility to do so rests with yourselves. Unite and Liberty Living's recent announcement makes it clear it is within your power as providers, owing to your complex mitigation plans, and we sincerely hope you would undertake these measures voluntarily for the sake of our students. For landlords who experience a financial impact as a result of this, you have access to a three-month mortgage holiday. We join the National Union of Students in lobbying Government to further support you in doing the right thing by students. Officers from both Unions have come together to propose 8 measures we strongly urge you to undertake:

1. Offer students a no-penalty release from their tenancy contracts, both for the current and upcoming academic year.
2. Refund those students who have paid rent and a deposit for the upcoming period.
3. Effectively reduce, subsidize or waive rent for tenants who have experienced a detrimental financial impact as a result of the Coronavirus.
4. Operate a holistic ban on evictions for all renters during this pandemic.
5. Stop all rent increases planned for the current and upcoming academic year.
6. Allow students with health conditions that increase their risk to the Coronavirus and thus wish to relocate to a more isolated part of their PBSA to do so at no extra cost.
7. In line with Liberty Living's stance, offer free of charge support beyond their current tenancy to those needing to extend their stay. This is crucial for international students who are unable to leave due to travel restrictions and for students who do not wish to return home to avoid placing a vulnerable member of their household at increased risk.
8. Implement and offer student tenants access to best practice public health advice, in addition to providing them with material and pastoral support.

The values you enact going forward in addressing the measures outlined above will shape our student community and society as a whole for years to come. There is no doubt this is the right thing to do. The business model, which is the very foundation of student accommodation, is singlehandedly dependent on the physical occurrence of university and the fact it has now moved to a virtual environment means the risk should be absorbed by providers and not by students. They are counting on your support and we hope you will provide it.

Yours Sincerely,

Brighton Students' Union

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