

## Written Responses to Public Questions

### Housing Policy Committee

**14<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

8 questions were referred to the Housing Policy Committee from the Central LAC. The questions submitted were from Mr Matthew Smith.

The questions and written responses provided following on from the Housing Policy Committee meeting are as follows:

Q1: Why is the email address for the SNUG scheme not made available on the SNUG scheme website?

**A1: Our preference is for landlords and tenants to use the contact form provided on the Snug website as a first point of contact as they are directed to our service when they click the 'Ask us a Question' link at the top right hand side of the Snug webpage. However, for ongoing contact we are quite happy for anyone to use the [snug@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:snug@sheffield.gov.uk) or [phs@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:phs@sheffield.gov.uk) and all routes initially are directed to our Liaison Team as first point of contact.**

Q2: What is the threshold the council requires for them to raise issues directly with accommodation providers under the SNUG scheme?

**A2: This depends on the type of complaint. Any complaint submitted to PHS (Snug related or not) will be received by us and initial advice and information will be given at the first point of contact. Where there are health and safety hazards in the property, the complaint would be allocated to an officer to investigate; this could include carrying out an inspection of the property if required. Where, for example there are concerns about the behaviour of a landlord or agent, or threats of illegal eviction, the case would be referred to one of our Tenancy Relations Officers. We would then work with the landlord / agent to ensure the complaint is resolved, if this is not possible then we would move to formal enforcement action should it be necessary. Where the evidence, on the balance of probabilities, suggests that the management of the property, or its condition, falls below the Snug standards, the case will be referred to our officer panel which meets monthly. That panel may decide to warn the member, to suspend them for a limited period pending further review, or to revoke their membership altogether.**

Q3: I understand that to date not one room in Purpose Built Student Accommodation in Walkley and Central ward has been inspected by Private Housing Standards. Does the committee agree this is unacceptable and will it lobby the council to remedy this?

**A3: Snug is not a mandatory scheme, it is a voluntary registration scheme which providers opt to join. When a provider applies to be a member of Snug all properties are inspected to ensure they are free from hazards, that they meet the Snug standards and Fit and Proper**

**checks are carried out on the management of the accommodation. We have 27 Purpose Built Student Accommodation block registered with Snug in Walkley and City Wards, all of which have been inspected within the last 2 years.**

Q4: The complaints process for the SNUG scheme was only made clear to me via a Freedom Of Information request to the council. Please can a clear complaints process and the email address for Private Housing Standards please be placed on the associated council web page for the SNUG scheme?

**A4: The process to make a complaint is set out in the Snug standards document which is already available on our webpage. However, I accept this point and will look to lift this information out of the standards document and add them to the webpage. I would also add that Snug is a partnership scheme so students can raise issues directly with us, their University or the Student Unions’.**

Q5: The directly run halls of residence in UK Universities are subject to what I understand to be much stricter standards set out by UK Universities than those in the private sector. What efforts if any are you making to redress this balance?

**A5: Higher education institutions sign up to a code of practice that has been approved by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). The Snug standards are in excess of, and additional to statutory regulatory standards. They also set out a high level of security of tenure and the Universities do not have their tenancy agreements checked for clarity and fairness as Snug properties do.**

Q6: What does the council class as Category 1 and Category 2 hazards in assessing private housing standards?

**A6: The Council assess properties by applying the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), this system dictates what a Category 1 and Category 2 hazard is. A Category 1 hazard is a hazard that scores over 1000 and a Category 2 hazard is one that scores below 1000 on the HHSRS system. This is in legislation which applies to all Local Authorities, it does not only apply to Sheffield City Council.**

Q7: Does membership of the SNUG scheme entitle the associated landlords to waive any obligations under the private housing standards regime, and if so which?

**A7: Snug members have to comply with Snug standards which are available on our website. No obligations as set out in law are waived by being a member of the Snug scheme. The Snug standards are in excess of, and additional to, statutory regulatory standards.**

Q8: Will the council commit to carrying out a wide consultation of students living in purpose built student accommodation across the city and introduce a facility for students living in such accommodation to raise concerns in an anonymous manner if they feel the need to do so?

**A8: There are currently 18,564 bedspaces within Snug, which is 554 properties. Fit and Proper checks are carried out on all Snug**

applications and all properties are inspected by a Private Housing Standards Officer to ensure they meet the Snug standards in terms of property condition and management. Any properties which landlords want to register and advertise through Sheffield Hallam University or the University of Sheffield (or both) need to be Snug approved. Properties will not be advertised or promoted until they are approved.

We also deliver the mandatory HMO licensing scheme, which applies to any HMO that is occupied by 5 or more people, forming 2 or more households sharing facilities (such as kitchen / bathroom). Fit and Proper checks are carried out on all HMO applications and we inspect them to ensure they meet HMO licence standards and management regulations. We currently have around 2,000 licenced HMOs in the city. We have a direct contact phone number (0114 2734860) and email address ([phs@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:phs@sheffield.gov.uk)) which is widely publicised and a webpage that provides information on the advice and support our service delivers. As a high number of student homes fall within Snug or HMO licensing, they are some of the most regulated private accommodation in the city.

In addition, both Universities have welfare teams and dedicated staff to which students can report issues to and the Student Union also take reports and concerns and actively engage with students. As they are all part of the Snug partnership complaints and reports are shared with us via our regular Snug Partnership meetings so we can investigate as necessary.

We encourage any student to report any issues directly to us, their University or the Student Unions' as Snug is a partnership scheme. Students can report issues anonymously as they can provide useful intelligence, and we will consider making that explicit on the website. However, we do prefer complaints which we can put directly to the landlord, as we can then ensure that the complaint is properly and fairly considered, which forms a much firmer basis for decision making.

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