

Private Housing (Tenancies) (Scotland) Bill

Written submission to the Infrastructure and Capital investment Committee

University of Aberdeen

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Private Housing (Tenancies) Scotland Bill which was introduced in the Parliament in October 2015.

The University of Aberdeen provided a response on the 2nd consultation paper earlier in 2015. Below are some issues that I think need to be considered in light of the bill being introduced.

The University accommodation will be exempt as an educational institution and this has been confirmed in the bill. However the University along with other educational institutions in Scotland have various contracts in place with private providers to ensure that all first year students are guaranteed an offer of accommodation while studying at Aberdeen.

It is disappointing that despite previous robust comments that purpose built student accommodation (PBSA) will not be exempt from the new bill.

No Fault Grounds

The removal of the no fault ground could put at risk the PBSA contractual commitment to provide accommodation at the beginning of the academic year. If a student decides not to vacate a property at the end of the academic year, stay throughout the summer and into the new academic year the room will be unable to be utilised until tenants have vacated or have given notice. This could lead to voids, in turn incurring costs for the provider or the University. In addition many contracts for Post Graduate students are for 51 weeks only leaving a week between contracts. We feel this could have a detrimental experience for the incoming tenant and impact on the student experience in particular young students who are arriving from abroad.

Returning students often begin the search for accommodation after the Christmas vacation, the majority of the PBSA providers have their rents and availability advertised at this time. The removal of the no fault ground could mean that they will not be able to advertise properties until existing tenants have left or have given notice. Many University students are not local to Aberdeen, Scotland or indeed the UK, it is important to them to have accommodation confirmed for when they return in September.

Rent Pressure Zones

Proposed rent pressure zones and rent increase caps were explained at length in the bill and the examples of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire are utilised in the bill accompanying notes.

There is no mention of other services that could be included within rents. The majority of PBSA have a management and security presence on site with some

offering resident support staff. Utilities and Wi-Fi are nearly always included within the rent, this is popular with students especially those who will be in larger flats. If a local authority choose to apply for rent capping measures to be introduced then additional services within rents should be acknowledged.

If you require any further information or wish to discuss further please do not hesitate to contact me.

Jacqueline Tuckwell
Head of Residential Services
University of Aberdeen
November 2015