

TO: Assembly
FROM: Kathryn Ellison
RE: End the Advertising of Unaffordable Housing
DATE: 4 February 2021

Assembly notes:

That two adverts have been placed in Epiphany term (12/01/21 and 19/01/21) for purpose built student accommodation, both relating to “Fresh” Student Accommodation’s “Dun holm House”, located in Durham City Centre. The Dun Holm development consists of en-suite rooms and studio apartments. Renting a room at Dun Holm house costs around £163 to £239 a week, or between £8313 - £12,189 a year.

The proposer of this motion got in contact with a representative for Fresh Student Living in Durham and was told that they had not yet decided whether or not to charge rent to international students who were not able to return due to Covid-19.

The proposer also phoned the main providers of private purpose built student accommodation in Durham to enquire whether or not rent had been forgiven for international students who had been unable to return to university this academic year.

This assembly notes that out of the six largest private purpose built accommodation providers in Durham, Fresh Student Living is the most expensive provider, with annual rent far exceeding the maximum student maintenance loan.

That in a letter addressed to Private Landlords, co-signed by Durham SU President Seun Twins and local MP Mary Foy, they were asked to consider refunds for those not able to return to Durham.

Finally, assembly also notes that last academic year, a motion was passed which requested that the SU attempt to advertise less unaffordable private accommodation. This motion will therefore serve as an extension to this policy.

Assembly believes:

That it is inappropriate for Durham SU to be advertising private accommodation during the Covid-19 crisis. Private landlords have refused to rebate rent to Durham students and it is confusing and hypocritical to be criticising them with one hand and advertising them with the other.

That advertising being done directly on the SU's social media can be interpreted as a SU endorsement of an organisation and will be interpreted as such by a significant number of students.

That by doing so, the SU significantly undermines its ability to effectively campaign for Durham students and damages the SU's credibility in the area of housing and accommodation.

That adverts for “luxury accommodation” (accommodation for which rent is significantly higher than the average student loan) can serve to distort student expectations of how much they should be willing to give landlords.

That if the SU is financially dependent on advertising from external organisations, such advertising should be limited to ethical providers which do not clash with the SU’s charitable aims, such as local businesses, careers development platforms and training services.

Assembly resolves:

To encourage an end to the advertisement of luxury accommodation in all circumstances

To encourage an end to advertising accommodation providers whose policy in terms of allowing students who cannot return to Durham to exit contracts or have rent forgiven for the duration of the pandemic as this directly contradicts the Union’s campaign policy