

9th February 2021

Dear Purpose-Built Student Accommodation Providers,

As lead representatives of Southampton's Students' Unions, it is our duty to amplify the concerns of our student community and ensure their voices are heard at a time of national crisis and uncertainty. Chief amongst students' concerns at present is the issue of accommodation rent payments and the uncertainty presented to students due to Coronavirus (Covid-19) and Government travel restrictions.

Across the country, following University and Government advice, students have travelled to the city in order to pursue an education with the understanding that a physical presence was required. Students entered into tenancies with the expectation that they needed to be here. Since the start of the academic year, the majority of students have had little to no face-to-face teaching and as such have had no reason to be paying rent in the city. In addition, and in line with government guidance, many students left the city to return home for the winter break in December, only to be instructed to remain at home, leaving many of them paying rent for rooms they are no longer occupying. In following such guidance, students now face increasing uncertainty as to where they stand in relation to their rent payments.

We are calling on all PBSA providers in the city to voluntarily enact five measures outlined below:

1. Allow students to be released from tenancy contracts if they wish, without financial penalties. (Including in the case of students whose contract was due to start in January 2021)
2. Refund 100% of rent for the weeks during the 3rd national lockdown in which students have been advised to not return to the city and be on campus, in line with national government guidance.
3. Commit to not charging rent for students who are unable to occupy their rooms on an ongoing basis.
4. Refund the rent paid by students that never moved into their accommodation.
5. Refund the rent for the weeks during the travel window before Christmas when students were planning to travel home were legally obliged to leave their student accommodation early.

We are facing a global crisis on a scale which has not been seen for generations. We believe that, as big companies that have complex mitigation plans, the financial difficulties should be taken on by those who have the ability to do so – the shock should not be absorbed by students.

Following on from the precedent set by Universities (including the University of Southampton and Solent) and private accommodation providers across the UK, it is evident that as PBSA providers you have the ability to refund students and release them from contracts. We are sure you will also be aware of national campaigns and student led organisations calling for these changes and we urge you to consider our requests carefully. We hope that you would join this direction of travel.

In writing this letter, we are speaking on behalf of the tens of thousands of students across Southampton. Student anxiety is at an all-time high and we hope you would do everything in your power to address these concerns.

We hope that you share this letter with your respective boards and take our concerns seriously.

We look forward to hearing from you.

**Winchester Student Union,
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