

Dear Landlords and Letting agents,

Here at the Students' Union we are very concerned about the public health risk posed by large scale house viewings if the annual student letting season goes ahead as normal.

We took the decision not to hold the Housing Fair, even virtually, because we believe it is not appropriate for our students to be viewing properties now, during a time of national lockdown and high rates of Covid 19 in the community, for properties they will not need or move into until next Summer.

We are strongly advising our students to delay house- hunting until conditions are safer. We are also asking our local landlords and agents to do the same and put public health and the safety of your current residents and staff first.

Although viewings or moving home may not be prohibited this is to allow those who need to move now to do so. It is unusual for properties to be marketed so far in advance of when they will be let and it is also not essential for such visits to be carried out months in advance of the property becoming vacant.

Public Health Sheffield and Sheffield City Council share our concerns and are advising landlords the following;

*"To keep Sheffield safe and healthy we are asking landlords to strike a reasonable balance between safeguarding health and managing their stock effectively. **We are therefore asking that landlords only carry out viewings where a property or part of a property is vacant, or where it is to fall vacant in the next 3 months.***

- *Where a viewing of an occupied property is to take place, in line with government guidance, this should be done by way of virtual viewing where possible.*
- *Confirm with any current occupiers whether they are isolating or shielding before arranging visits, postponing visits where any current resident is shielding or isolating until suitable arrangements can be made for the viewing to be completed safely;*
- *Do not carry out viewings unless you are sure that the current occupiers have agreed to adhere to appropriate social distancing (note that you can not require tenants to follow social distancing in their own homes)*
- *Don't carry out open house viewings;*
- *Make sure that the hot water supply is fully functioning and that windows can be opened and securely closed;*
- *Make sure that the unit of accommodation, the shared areas and the furniture and furnishings provided are in a good, clean condition;*

- *Take your own towels/paper towels/ hand gel and wash your hands thoroughly when attending the property; dispose of used tissue and masks using double bags, and ensure that those visiting to view do the same;*
- *Wear a face covering, and ensure prospective tenants who view use them too;*
- *Sanitise keys before and after handing to contractors or tenants.”*

We would urge you to follow this advice and would ask the whole student letting community to work together and agree to delay the house letting season until next Semester.

Please do not force viewings on existing residents if they are unhappy or worried about it and follow appropriate safety guidance at all times. We have received complaints from student tenants and letting agency staff who are concerned that safety measures are not being followed.

Our first year students have had a very difficult start to their student life and have had less opportunity to meet potential housemates and explore the City. We feel that many will be less prepared than in a normal year to make decisions about next year. In addition, students will be forced to leave Sheffield early if they want to return home for Christmas, we do not want them to be rushing into signing contracts.

If conditions allow we will hold a Housing Fair next semester and will help link up our students with good landlords and priority will be given to those who have followed appropriate safety measures. We will also prevent all advertising for landlords and agents in the SU who are seen to be forcing viewings on our students or failing to follow the safety guidance.

We hope that you will work with us in keeping our students and our local community safe at this difficult time,

SU Officers