

Rogue landlords facing purge over fire safety for students

Mark Branagan

MORE THAN 1,600 students are to benefit from a purge on rogue landlords by housing chiefs concerned about fire safety in a North Yorkshire university town. Scarborough Council leaders are being urged to enforce a new code to ensure that members of Hull University's Scarborough campus enjoy good standards. Scarborough Council is responsible for ensuring the students sleep safe. But so far its approach has been to respond to complaints, rather than checking the accommodation out in advance.

Andy Skelton, head of environmental services, said: "The University of Hull has expanded its student intake in recent years.

"There are currently around 1,600 students at the University. Many of these students are not permanent residents of the borough and require accommodation during their period of stay. Many of these students live in accommodation that is accredited/approved by the university."

Now the town hall is to team up with the college to introduce a certification scheme involving an inspection programme to ensure landlords measure up.

Scarborough Council is responding to 2004 legislation which introduced extra responsibilities for local authorities regarding housing need.

The Fire Service is responsible for enforcing safety standards in commercial premises, sheltered housing, hotels, B&Bs and hostels.

All other residential dwellings, including student accommodation, are policed by the council.

Hull University currently uses about 75 blocks of flats or shared houses to accommodate its students, including 25 properties leased directly by the university from private landlords.

The stock also includes 50 shared houses/blocks of flats owned by private landlords who are approved/accredited by the university under their "student

pad" scheme, and halls of residence.

Mr Skelton added: "Generally student accommodation, like other forms of shared housing is considered to be 'high risk' with regard to the potential for fires to occur.

"It is essential, therefore, that all student accommodation within the borough, used by the university complies with minimum fire safety standards."

Historically, joint working with the university in respect of fire safety in student accommodation has been in response to concern raised by the university or a student.

Officers have therefore been in

University and council to join forces for inspections

discussions with the university to explore options about working closer to improve standards in student accommodation and thus reduce the risk of fire related incidents.

A routine programme of fire safety inspections is to be launched for all accommodation accredited by the university and that providers of that accommodation are provided with fire safety certificates.

Mr Skelton continued: "All proposed student accommodation is inspected by the council before it is approved by the university to ensure that the property complies with relevant fire safety standards including fire

alarms, extinguishers, and door closers."

Annual inspections will also be made by trained university staff to check on-going compliance against required standards.

Any breach will result in the withdrawal of the fire safety certificate and accreditation with the university.

Officials have underlined that if the council's stick to the bolting the "stable door" approach to fire safety in student property, the undergraduates will continue to remain at high risk.

At the very worst this could lead to young people being killed or injured in blazes. "Adoption of these proposals will ensure that minimum fire safety provisions are in place for all accommodation," he added.