

R20-2: Opposing Fife Council's Increased HMO charges.

In Effect- Immediately

Review Date- 31/01/2021

Notes

- 1) Fife Council recently increased the University of St Andrews HMO Fee from £54 000 every three years to £512 000 every three years.
- 2) The vast majority of this price uplift (85%) comes from Fife Council's decision to treat each individual flat in David Russel Apartments as a separate HMO, rather than each block as previously.
- 3) A Freedom of Information Request by the University of St Andrews showed that the cost to Fife Council of renewing all of the University's HMOs was around £80,000
- 4) The Statutory Guidance for Scottish Local Authorities (Licensing HMOs) states under 3.4.3 that the Provision of Services Regulations 2009 require that fees charged in relation to a licensing regime must be reasonable and proportionate to, but not exceed the costs of all procedures required to carry out this function.
- 5) The Royal Burgh of St Andrews Community Council has condemned the decision by Fife Council as "bizarre and irresponsible"
- 6) The Senior Students of every Hall of Residence also oppose the changes.
- 7) Srdja Popovic, Rector of the University of St Andrews, referred to the changes as "ridiculous, an absolutely terrible idea."
- 8) The changes were also condemned by Fife Councillors Dominic Nolan and Jane Anne Liston

Believes

- 1) That increasing the cost of halls of residence in St Andrews is bad for both students and locals.
- 2) That more expensive halls will lead to greater competition for rented flats, with adverse effects for community cohesion and affordability.
- 3) That while we do not object to a rise in HMO Fees in principle, the method used to calculate it is unhelpful and unfair.

Resolves

- 1) To endorse, and encourage students to sign, the open letter attached to this motion (Appendix A)
- 2) To join the Community Council and the University of St Andrews in expressing its opposition to the fee increase.
- 3) To issue a joint press release, with Community Council, indicating the above.

Appendix A

We the undersigned call on Fife Council to reconsider the huge HMO charges being placed on students following the decision of the Fife Councils Policy and Coordination committee.

Students- like everyone else in St Andrews, are placed under huge financial strain by the cost of living. We therefore find the decision of Fife Council to increase the University of St Andrew's HMO fees from £54000 to £512000, a rise of almost 800% bizarre and irresponsible. Not only does the huge size of the increase problematic in itself, but the way it has been calculated is totally unfair. Roughly £434 000 (85%) of the new HMO costs come from the increase applied to David Russell Apartments, due to Fife Council charging a separate HMO fee for each of DRA's 224 identical purpose built flats, rather than charging per block as previously.

Figures released after a Freedom of Information request by the University show that the cost to Fife Council of carrying out HMO checks on every University Residence stands at around £80000- perhaps coincidentally, almost exactly the same cost that would be charged if Fife Council calculated the DRA fees by block rather than by flat. The Statutory Guidance for Scottish Local Authorities (Licensing HMOs) states under 3.4.3 that the Provision of Services Regulations 2009 require that fees charged in relation to a licensing regime must be reasonable and proportionate to, but not exceed the costs of all procedures required to carry out this function." And yet, by distorting the HMO fees for some properties, Fife Council looks set to make a significant profit at our expense.

The potential impacts of this are huge. It means increased costs for students, forcing them to move out of University Halls and into rented accommodation. This means in turn that competition for rented accommodation will increase, making St Andrews less affordable and less liveable for local residents and students alike. It will do further damage to community cohesion, and make it even more difficult for young people to afford to live here. At a time when both students and local residents are crying out for cheaper accommodation, this places extra costs and barriers on everyone, whether living in halls or rented accommodation.

In short, we do not disagree in principle with an increase in HMO Fees if these fees are used to cover the costs incurred by HMO licences. But the implementation of this policy is counterproductive, unfair and unhelpful, and should be reconsidered.

Proposed

Jamie Rodney, President of the Student's Association

Seconded

Flora Smith, Student's Association Director of Wellbeing

Morgan Morris, Association Community Relations Officer

Polina Sevastyanova, Member for First Years