

## **1487 Motion: University Rents**

**Proposer: Bintu Foday** (Community and Student Rights Officer)

**Seconded: Rosie Rawle** (Communication Officer)

### **Union Notes**

1. That the Union is not consulted on increases in costs of university accommodation, it is merely "briefed"
2. This is done confidentially without a clear rationale for that confidentiality or lack of consultation
3. The University says that in considering the amount it carries out:
  - a. A comparison between the predicted intake of students in the various groups which are guaranteed rooms in residences and the number actually recruited.
  - b. A comparison between the predicted intake of students in the various groups which are guaranteed rooms in residences and the number actually moving in to residences.
  - c. A comparison between the supply of rooms and the demand for rooms in the different categories.
  - d. Rents in other universities and in the local private sector.
4. Detail on these issues is shared with the Union as part of the briefing
5. It also says that it look at
  - a. Current financial forecasts and expectations of the Executive Team (Resources)
6. Detail on this issue is not shared with the union without considerable sustained questioning
7. After this questioning it has been revealed that next year the University expects accommodation to make £1m in profit against a target this year of £350k. This surplus will go into "general; university funds"
8. The union does not take into account the financial situation faced by students
9. Half of "student choice" National Scholarship Programme bursaries for poor students go on accommodation discounts
10. There is no link between the university's rent strategy and the university's widening participation strategy
11. The university currently has an undersupply rate of 50% for "Value Standard" accommodation but is not investing in this type of accommodation at all

### **Union Believes**

1. Any like for like increase in rent costs, in a context of the student funding package being frozen in absolute (and reduce in real) terms, is unacceptable.
2. It is even more unacceptable that the increase comes at a time of student support cuts for the poorest students, half of whom use the funding to fund their accommodation (NSP).
3. It is worse still that the increase from £350k surplus to £1m surplus won't fund improvements to accommodation but will go into the central pot.

4. It is overall worse still that this is not a matter of consultation with students but a mere matter of confidential briefing.
5. Students should be involved in the strategy around student accommodation and its pricing at all stages of the process.
6. There is material risk that the university will distort pricing across Norwich; increase student financial problems, destroy its reputation as a cheap student city
7. Meetings should be set up throughout the year, early enough for the Union to properly feed in to the procedure and followed up before final decisions are made.
8. The University should adopt a long term strategy that relates and responds specifically to the climate of student finance and wider geo-economic concerns. As well as examining rents to competitors the University should compare its rent levels to a cross section of the financial support different groups of students will receive. This should be referenced in any papers that discuss accommodation costs with potential increases and should work directly with the relevant departments.
9. As part of this the University should have a clear commitment to the student experience, ensuring that they employ a balanced pricing strategy based on the importance of choice and real affordability.
10. The role of affordable accommodation in relation to access and widening participation should be acknowledged in the strategy. A joined up approach should be employed to ensure that no student is excluded from a residential experience of education.
11. Not only should a range of rents be available, but there should be an agreed policy statement on the institutional definition of affordability to ensure that the lower end of the rental structure is genuinely affordable and represents a reasonable proportion of the options on offer.
12. The University should write and consult with the Union on a rent setting strategy for the next 5 years that shows a transparent approach for how it aims to work towards more affordable housing for students.
13. The University should cease to apply academic sanctions for non-academic debt and pursue debt recovery in these instances.

### **Union Resolves**

- To campaign to halt the proposed increases in like for like rent until the above concerns have been met
- To lobby for changes to the consultation and transparency processes as above