

Student housing survey highlights gas and electrical safety problems



● Example of dangerous electrical wiring of appliances on communal landing.

5 BED SHARED HOUSE - Whole property available now, Brookfield Avenue, Leeds 5. **Rent: £120.00 per room per week - deposit: £20.00.** Tenancy agreement. Assured shorthold. First advertised October 2 1991. Further details: Available to non-university students. Large kitchen, separate lounge, newly decorated.

5 BED SHARED HOUSE - Whole property available now, Karmac Road, Leeds 5. **Rent: £20.00 per room per week - deposit: £20.00.** Tenancy agreement. Assured shorthold. First advertised October 2 1991. Further details: Available to non-university students. Lounge, newly decorated, garden, large rooms.

5 BED SHARED FLAT - 1 house available now, Shaftesbury Avenue, Leeds 5. **Rent: £21.00 per room per week - deposit: £20.00.** Tenancy agreement. Assured shorthold. First advertised October 2 1991. Further details: Visit house (No. 344). Very attractive flat with large rooms, phone, central heating, lounge, newly decorated. Main University students only.

5 BED SHARED HOUSE - 5 rooms available now, Goodwin Valley Road, Leeds 5. **Rent: £28.50 per room per week - deposit: £20.00.** Tenancy agreement. Assured shorthold. First advertised October 2 1991. Further details: Visit house (No. 17). Central heating, phone, garden. Main University students only.

Dweller/Manager: University Scheme, Contact: Mrs Griffiths, University Accommodation, Room 6.06, Physics Admin 9.30-12.30 & 1.30-4.30.

Preliminary findings from the 1991 Housing Survey conducted by Leeds, Leeds University Union and Leeds Polytechnic Students' Union suggests wide spread problems in gas and electrical safety amongst students in the Private Rented Sector.

Property owners are obliged to maintain gas and electrical systems in safe working order," said Philip Davies, Welfare Officer (Housing) of Leeds University Union. He went on to say "It is generally accepted amongst the electricity and gas supply authority that if a tenant notices mal-functioning on gas and electrical systems there is a major flaw. There is no evidence of stress damage, usually not uncovered until the system are

inspected by qualified persons."

In the survey tenants were asked whether they felt that their electrical and gas systems and appliances (as provided by the owners) were safe and not too complex why. Some of the comments made showing reading. The quotes below are a selection taken from the survey and are just a few of many.

"Electrical wires often hang into flames in some rooms."

"One occupant receives severe shock from lights (switches) and was knocked to the ground, wiring overloads when being laid to."

"Sockets have a habit of exploding, also the fuse box often melts!"

"Electric shocks from fridge."

"Plugs melt in sockets and cracks (blue sparks), had to be cut when they melted!"

"Gas leak alarm safety standard (house had to be evacuated, 20% plus gas content) of gas in rooms."

"Had to stop using the gas for because of causing sickness."

"Gas has practically 'blown you up when you light it, cooker often blows itself out'"

1132 Welfare Secretary, Amanda Gokhale said: "If any students have got a problem with their gas or electricity, there are a variety of ways and people to help with the problem. Please come into the Union and ask for advice or pick up a leaflet setting out what happens outside themselves."

University plans new accommodation to cope with student numbers expansion

The University's Green Paper for student numbers, in the 1992 expansion of student numbers, double increases in full-time students from 12,000 in 1991/92 academic year to 18,000 by 1995/96. The University is committed to maintaining a competitive for Undergraduate entry and perceives as guarantee of a place in halls and Ben for First Years as helpful in maintaining its good reputation and record.

The University is planning new developments of self-catering accommodation together with enhancement of its existing stock to provide 1,300 new beds by 1995/96. Gail Potts, Assistant Director of Catering and Residential Services said: "All possible avenues for increasing our stock of accommodation are being examined including possible collaboration with Leeds Polytechnic."

When asked to comment, Enoch McCallis, General Secretary said: "We support the realistic expansion of University accommodation for a variety of reasons."

"Firstly, research has confirmed that students housed within the University portfolio achieve better deals in the private sector which they look for accommodation towards the end of their first year. If the University was unable to house First Years' then forced to live in the private rented sector would be subject to others."

"Secondly, a shortfall in the number of beds the University provides would directly increase demand in the private sector and this will tend to encourage private landlords to the out of the student community. More importantly however, University rents are more competitive than those in the private sector and the quality is much higher."

"The more accommodation the University can provide the greater will be the competitive pressure on rents charged by private landlords and this is of benefit to all students - not just those living in University accommodation."



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PRESENTS

"The Hellish House of the Year Competition 1991"

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- ★ Bottles of Champagne ★
- ★ Free Food ★
- ★ Crates of Beer ★
- ★ Assistance from Welfare Services for any problem identified ★

Return to Exec. by November 18th

...So I suppose you want a Jacuzzi with your double glazed bathroom and new shower point!...

I expect you, like every year before, 1000's of students roamed the streets of Leeds in search of their first real home from home. This year, like every year before, 100's of them have been wrangling with their landlords and landlords over problems they could have avoided. If only they had known how. To make next year unlike any other, HOUSING STUDENT has set out the 9 questions every student should ask themselves before embarking on a house-hunt and with them the 9 answers to help solve their problems.

Q The first question you need to ask yourself is Do you want to rent a property over a 12 week period or are you only interested in paying rent from September onwards?

The answer to this question will determine how you should start looking for accommodation.

Many landlords/lettors will let their properties for a full year with the property agents often starting running from July till to June 30th of the following year. Other landlords will not their properties out from September to April so being possible over the summer.

A If you are looking for a house to rent from July till end are willing to pay rent over the summer period, house-hunting season really begins at the end of February, with many students signing property agreements over March and April to take effect in July.

If by March of this year one third of all returning students had signed agreements to rent property over 12 weeks.

If you are looking for a house to rent from September onwards, it is not too late in the first couple of weeks of July and the first two weeks of August, so that you may be able to find the 'A' Level results in the third

week of August. (Utopia can provide their accommodation over the summer until mid-September while you look for a house).

Q What are the types of housing available for rent?

A Shared House & Shared Flat. About 80% of students live in this type of accommodation. Shared houses normally rent a room in a house and share the kitchen, living room (if there is one), bathroom and toilet.

B Bedsit. About 12% of students live in this type of accommodation. A bedsit is a room which contains some form of self-contained amenity, normally a small kitchen or separate washing or cooking facilities. Bedsits often share a bathroom and toilet with some residents.

C Self-Contained Flats. About 8% of students live in this type of accommodation. A self-contained flat is where some of the facilities are shared. A flat should have its own bathroom, toilet and kitchen.

Q Where can I look for a house?

A Utopia - 3 Foston Street, Leeds LS1 5EA

This is the major source of advertising in Leeds. Utopia operates a notice board for landlords to advertise their properties and a student-to-student notice board where students can advertise spare rooms in their houses to other students. Utopia is recognised by most private landlords as the latest and most effective way of finding their properties to students.

There are other limited sources of supply of accommodation.

(i) Local Newspaper - Mainly in the Yorkshire Evening Post like a Friday. Utopia displays the relevant notices of the YEP daily in the Accommodation House.

(ii) Newspapers - In the window.

(iii) University & Polytechnic Students' Union Notice Board. Ask the Porters where these are located.

(iv) Estate Agents and Accommodation Agencies.

Q How long does it take to look for a house?

A The more property you visit the more you will get. It is important to know about property standards and rent levels so you can make a better informed choice.

This can take anything between a couple of days and a couple of weeks.

It is very, very important that you do not visit a substantial number of houses before the housing shortage starts of last year, new properties were brought by private landlords/lettors. This has led to a excess of houses on the market at Utopia (3000's) - October 1991.

So please do not be satisfied with what you see. Visit as many as you can but what you were looking for, the 'house of your dream'.

Q What level of rent can I expect to pay?

A Rents are set by landlords/lettors who take into account 'market forces'. After the housing shortage starts in shared houses, in some areas rent is between £35-£40 per week. This eventually settled at £32.50 on average.

There are all types of accommodation in the Leeds 6 area. This is where between 55% and 50% of students live. There is an increasing number of students moving out of the 'student ghetto' and into areas like Harrogate, Kirkstall and Ilkley. Rent there is always higher than in Leeds. There are also many changes in these areas and often the houses are a lot bigger.

Utopia and the Students' Union have available The Best Level Guide. This provides an alphabetical list of streets with all the previous rent levels given for the year in each street. This can be very useful when you are being asked to pay, so other rent levels in the same street.

Q What should I look for when viewing a property?

REPAIRS: make sure you get what you pay for

What to do if the landlord does not do necessary repairs. Note: Always inform the landlord first in writing about required repairs and always follow the correct procedure to avoid evictions due to rent arrears.

Take your complaint to the Environmental Health Department for emergencies and major repairs.

Advantages

- Can be quick with emergencies.
- Can do conflict arbitration between tenant and landlord if conflict arises over the complaint.

Consent may become aware of other tenants and take on responsibility for this work with landlord.

Disadvantages

- Can be slow because of bureaucracy.
- Can lead to court proceedings if repairs are not carried out.

The Courts

Can set out potential, disrepair list for small - not major repairs.

Advantages

- Can get damages.
- Can get legal aid.
- Can be quick.

A Home Housing checklist can be obtained from Utopia or the Students' Union. Please consult this for before you start house-hunting. Time spent systematically inspecting a house can save you a lot of time, money and headache later on.

Q Should I just sign the contract once I have found the 'house of my dreams'?

A No. You should always get someone to check it for you if there is anything in it which you don't understand.

Q What are the facilities available?

A 1. Landlord Fully Insured - ?

A 2. Best Level Indicator - (see What level of rent can I expect to pay?)

A 3. Advice on Students' Unions and Utopia

* This contains information on landlords and their properties. The file contains names and addresses of previous student occupants. The index has over 6,000 entries and these are filed in alphabetical order by the landlord's/lettor's name.

Q I've lost my key to everything I've advised to, so what - is a landlord - as the most important points to remember!

A Never sign anything you don't understand.

Check out any potential landlord before signing any agreement.

Check out your potential future landlord using the Landlord Index in Utopia and the Students' Union.

Use the Home Housing checklist when you look at any house you are thinking of buying.

Private sector tenancy problems on the increase

Utopia Student Homes and University Union Welfare Services have received a significant increase in tenants seeking help with problems. The two major areas of complaints are failures of owners and managing agents to undertake repairs within property and owners also are refusing to accept industry deposits.

Philip Davies, Welfare Officer (Housing) at the University Union pointed out that large rent increases had not been reflected by increasing levels of scholarship and repair standards of property. Some owners still good track records have refused their holdings but there still remains many property owners who are refusing to invest any of this income in maintaining their legal obligations to tenants.

"It is finding that tenants are no longer able to afford the luxury of allowing landlords to get away with failing to carry out repairs. There have been increased bad news between rent charges and the withdrawal of housing benefits. They are becoming much more aware of their rights and are trying to deliver the goods. This is a good thing and needs to be encouraged."

"In the present time we are helping many cases of students who are refusing to pay their houses. Repairs that



Severe damp penetration in an attic room.

they have been entitled to and waiting for six months for up to six months.

"In many cases you are the purchasing decision maker against owners to compensate the tenants for having to put up with the delay in repairs and bad conditions."

Annabel Davidson, Welfare Secretary reported several cases of amounts waiting to return up to £500 of tenants deposit money. She said that owners are reporting problems more readily but there are still many who are unaware that there is an case remedy

against owners who refuse to repay deposits.

In one case a landlord accused tenants of taking furniture from the house. Upon investigation the found the furniture had been stored in the cellar and the landlord was fined to pay £400. Amanda said: "If you haven't had your deposit returned and you feel you have been wronged during your tenancy, come and see us. Recovery of debt is straightforward and we will give you an opinion about your chances of success."

If you have anything valuable, e.g. a bike, bring it to outside the Union on Wednesday, 6th November, 10am - 3pm to have it posted.

National Consumer Council says:

"Deathtrap housing is a scandal that must not be tolerated"

Around two million people are living in rooms from private landlords in properties that do not meet a standard of decency, says Lady Wilson, chairman of the National Consumer Council, weekly.

"This is a scandal that cannot be tolerated in 1991," she said, speaking at a press conference in London to launch a new National Consumer Council report, *Deathtrap Housing*.

The report demands a general action by central and local governments to deal with fire risks in houses in multiple occupation — bedsits, boarders, shared houses, lodgings — in England and Wales. It includes the results of a unique survey carried out by NCC of local councils' fire safety inspection and enforcement practices and concludes that changes in the law introduced in 1989 do not go far enough to protect tenants.

Crime rates soar in Leeds' student areas

According to figures just released, burglaries in the main "student ghetto" around Leeds are now at their highest level ever.

1991 has already seen well over a thousand incidents, with 554 burglaries reported to Metropolitan Police Station since January last. Certain areas of Leeds are even statistically comparable to much more renowned areas such as Moss Side in Manchester, Becontree in London, and St Pauli's in Bristol.

An anecdotal result of this has been a refusal by a national insurance company either to insure or to re-insure students living in LS6. So how bad is it really?

According to a Police spokesman:

...in 1989 do not go far enough to protect tenants.

The Council calls, among other things, for local councils to be obliged to inspect ALL LHM's in their areas to ensure that they meet required safety standards — or prevent them as only required by law to impose the biggest "fine out of five houses are unsafe".

NCC Chairman, Lady Wilson said: "One out of five houses in multiple occupation are unsafe, according to a survey by the Department of the Environment in 1985, and local surveys since then have come up with similar figures. It is an absolute disgrace."

"Around one and a half million people on low incomes in England and Wales — students included — young people, families with children, and elderly and disabled people — live in these properties, and we estimate

that around two million of them are in similar areas. At a time of housing scarcity, many have no choice."

"Most of these properties lack proper means of escape in the event of a fire. Some contain section-bedsits which in family estates swing and create upheavals."

"How many parents, delighted that their children have now a place at university or polytechnic, realize that some of them will be living in houses that are a potential deathtrap? Students have died in fires in such accommodation — as have other young people, elderly and disabled people and children."

"In 1989 the latest for which we have figures, 101 people lost their lives in such fires — that's more than three every week — and 4,308 more were injured."

Secretary Amanda Goldstein described the typical student area as a "gill to burglar". She added: "Tenants should demand that their landlords fit adequate door locks and window locks."

Edna McCarthy, General Secretary of LNU, who has burgled three times when living on Riverside Grove last year, is also concerned. "Burglary is a social evil in our society. A fact of life when living in Leeds. It is extortion of this kind, surely, insurance has become essential."

"Students should complain to their landlords, either in person or via the Union Welfare office, until repairs participate to doors and windows are carried out, but students should call work on the assumption that they will be burgled at some point."

...not too bad. "Crime in the student areas of Leeds is almost exclusively confined to non-student burglaries," said Inspector Knausler. "Furthermore the majority of incidents occur when properties are unoccupied, particularly during the Christmas and Easter vacations."

Burglaries tend to be carried out by gangs of youths in their early hours targeting whole streets at one time. Entry is usually made by applying something solid to break down locks which are invariably secured to the wall. The property will then be burgled in a matter of minutes with students' property coming through the back door and taken in a waiting car or van.

So what can we do? LNU Welfare

Can the City Council help?

One of the options open to tenants facing difficulties with repairs is to contact the Local Authority. Andy Beattie, Principal Environmental Health Officer with Leeds City Council explains what help is available.

The City Council has extensive powers to deal with a wide variety of problems associated with domestic accommodation. These enable it to be taken in respect of disrepair and inadequate standards of safety and amenity in houses. Somebody of domestic pollution problems such as drain accumulations, drainage defects, etc., as well as taking action on a wide variety of neighbourhood-type complaints such as noise and nuisance matters.

Comprehensive advice and assistance is available on all the above matters and additionally, access can be obtained to Housing, Energy, Light, Landlord and Tenant responsibilities in housing, noise, harassment and illegal evictions can also be dealt with.

Who do you contact?

Housing, Complaints and Nuisance Officers are dealt with by Environmental Health Officers (EHOs) and support staff in the Housing Renewal Division. Harassment, energy, light and tenants rights issues by Housing Advice and in particular Anti-Harassment and Illegal Eviction Teams. In practice, although the teams will often liaise on any particular case.

The EHOs are team-based, with each team covering an area of the city, and so depending upon where you live you should contact:

Chapelton Harbours Road & Woodhouse Leeds — Roundhill Road, L16, 298 Telephone: 466225

Woodhouse/Wharfedale & Duffley Leeds — Roundhill Road, L16, 297 Telephone: 474241

Hyde Park/Riverside/Kirkstall & Airedale Leeds — Roundhill Road, L16, 294 Telephone: 502244

Housing Advice are currently based at Dudley House — telephone 419077, but with effect from the end of November 1991 a Housing Advice Centre will be opening at 1177, The Meadows, Leeds, where staff will be available to give advice and assistance to callers and arrange for further investigation of complaints in appropriate cases.

Complaints are treated confidentially. A representative from the Advice Team will be available during the Housing Survey on Friday 10th November in the Riley Smith Hall at 1077, The Meadows, Leeds. What service do you need?

With respect to housing defects, following a visit and property inspection, officers will decide what actions are taken to remedy any defects or deteriorations and advise you accordingly.

In all cases the officer will consider whether the property meets the Council's standards for levels of occupation, amenity provision and means of escape from fire as well as disrepair. If the property is below standard, the officer will issue a working notice taken by the landlord or landlord.

In the case of harassment/illegal evictions, Housing Advice Officers will not only give advice on a wide range of housing concerns, but will also consider making representations on the tenant's behalf to landlords/landladies and to certain authorities where illegal action can be considered, take proceedings on your behalf in the courts.

How to make a complaint

Visit or telephone the appropriate officer and talk to speak either to the EHO or Housing Advice Officer responsible for the area in which you live. The best time to call Area Offices is between 10.00am or 4.00pm, since it takes three times as long as office out making house calls. The Housing Advice Centre will however, be open during normal office hours. In making a complaint, ensure that you:

- Give clear details of the problem.
- Give your full name and address and telephone number.
- Give full name and address of the landlord/landlady.
- Arrange a convenient time for the officer to visit.
- Why should you bother?

Poor housing can be linked to poor health, joblessness and greater risk of accidents, or specifically through the risk of fire in multiple occupied houses without safe means of escape in the case of fire. You should have a right to expect reasonably acceptable accommodation, since that is what you are paying for.

Percentage of student income left spent on private sector rents in Leeds.



As from 1988-89, the NCC has been monitoring the impact of the new Rent Act on private sector rents in Leeds.

WHATEVER YOU THINK — FIRE CAN HAPPEN TO YOU

SOME LEEDS STUDENTS' HOUSES ARE NOT FIRE PROOF!

At least two houses were completely burnt to the ground last year.

HAVE YOU GOT A SMOKE ALARM?
HAVE YOU GOT AN ADEQUATE MEANS OF ESCAPE?

If not, go and see the Fire Exhibition in the Riley Smith, on Thursday 7th November and buy a smoke alarm



Students squeezed by rent increases and benefit withdrawal

Since the 1980-89 academic year, real increases in the Private Rental Sector and the Abolition of State Benefits have combined to reduce Student disposable income on some other than rent to 425-00 per week.

- In daily life this would be:
- A sandwich
 - A loaf of bread
 - A pint of milk
 - A can of beans
 - One five pence cinema ticket
 - A quality newspaper

The Inflation Reduction Series (I.R.S.) 1981 to 1990 defined poverty as: "A household that cannot afford three or more of the necessary needs of food, clothing and fuel, not damp accommodation."

Amanda Goldstein said: "It's not something we don't already know."