

The hire grade students

Property agency trains its staff to be perfect neighbours



by
Graham Grant

WITH their reputation for squalid flats, loud music and rowdy parties, it is little wonder some people are not too keen on living next door to students.

The late Foreign Secretary Robin Cook asked council chiefs to ban youngsters from the local university moving in to a flat above him.

And councillors in St Andrews have even been accused of 'evicting' students from the Fife town.

But now a Scots firm has found an innovative way of persuading communities that student tenants are not 'neighbours from hell'.

Splendid Property Management is able to assure householders that its tenants are trustworthy – because it is employing them.

About 400 students work for the Edinburgh company's events and catering division, mostly as waiters at functions.

And any employees are able to apply for a flat from the residential letting side of the business.

This means Splendid knows who



Doing his home-work: Property firm boss James Brooks, left, knows Matthew McLuckie will be a good tenant because the student works for his events company

its tenants are – and is also confident they are earning enough to pay their rent on time.

Company boss James Brooks believes the project could improve relations between students and local communities.

He said: 'Our young, part-time employees need somewhere to live and we want reliable tenants for our properties, so it makes sense.'

'We teach our tenants how to take care of their flats, including making sure they clean communal areas regularly and respect neighbours who won't want to be woken up at

all hours of the night. We also tell them to introduce themselves to their neighbours.'

'And we send a letter to each neighbour telling them who has moved in and who we are – so if there is a problem they can't sort out themselves, they can call us.'

'The problems of poor relations between students and neighbours is a serious one in Edinburgh. We're doing something positive to try to sort that out.'

Matthew McLuckie, 21, a third year geography student at Edinburgh University, is an employee of

department of environment and consumer services said: 'The council recognises that it is extremely important to make sure students live in safe and well-managed accommodation.'

'It is also our aim that students become part of the community they live in and act with consideration for their neighbours.'

YET the welcome mat appears to have been pulled away in St Andrews, where dozens of students have been effectively 'evicted' from their flats by local councillors.

They recently rejected more than 30 applications for certificates allowing landlords to let out flats.

The councillors complained that some areas of St Andrews were becoming 'student ghettos'. But their decisions have led to a housing crisis in the town, which is home to Scotland's oldest university.

Students who had signed leases returned for the new term to find their lease no longer applied and they were effectively homeless.

Student representatives fear the council rejected the Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) applications purely for political reasons.

Alex Yabroff, president of the Students' Association, said: 'The HMO licence exists solely to ensure the safety of students.'

'Using it to alter the demography of the town has effects that are simply irresponsible.'