

Response from Racing Welfare: housing need in the horseracing industry

Introduction

Housing has long been seen as an issue in the horseracing industry. It is a topic about which there are strong opinions, but where robust data and coherent evidence are lacking and knowledge is informed by personal experience and anecdotal evidence. Racing Welfare commissioned the University of Cambridge to conduct an independent study to analyse housing need in the horseracing industry.

Independent research

The aim of the research was to establish the degree and nature of current unmet need for affordable housing amongst racing staff and to make recommendations as to how that need may best be met. The research included a background review of existing evidence, a national survey of racing staff, interviews with industry employers and staff, and a housing need and affordability analysis across the six main racing areas.

Industry Involvement

A collaborative approach was adopted in agreeing the scope and structure of this research project and we would like to thank the key industry stakeholders, employers and staff that contributed. We are also grateful to the Racing Foundation for providing the funding which enabled Racing Welfare to undertake this work on behalf of the Thoroughbred horseracing and breeding industry.

Key findings

The full research report and summary can be found here:

<http://www.cchpr.landecon.cam.ac.uk/>

The most common issues raised in the survey were that housing is of a poor standard, is expensive in relation to wages and there is a lack of available accommodation.

The quantitative housing need analysis showed that, if we consider affordable housing to be spending 35% or less of net income on housing costs, then for a high proportion of staff in the racing industry there is a lack of affordable housing. There is some regional variation, but housing is least affordable for single people, particularly young singles, and lone parents.

However, these results need to be considered in the context of the broader research findings. Some households will be spending more than the benchmark of 35% of their net income on housing costs. The survey and interviews showed that some staff will be living

with their family, living in employer provided housing, sharing housing to reduce costs, or more generally living in the lower end of the housing market.

The research highlighted issues with housing in the private rented sector. There was stigma from landlords who were reported not to want to rent properties to racing staff, particularly very young people. They were considered to be poor tenants, likely not to maintain properties and with a high risk of non-payment of rent and leaving without giving proper notice.

Recommendations

The research identified a number of recommendations. Whilst Racing Welfare cannot solve all the problems of a lack of affordable housing, there were issues that Racing Welfare could consider addressing in the short, medium and long-term. Some of these recommendations could also be addressed by other industry stakeholders. There are further recommendations that the wider industry would need to consider collectively.

Racing Welfare actions

On the basis of this research, Racing Welfare is planning to implement some of the key recommendations and will facilitate dialogue and action in the wider industry to bring about positive change.

The actions that Racing Welfare will be taking forward fall into three broad categories which address a number of recommendations:

1. Racing Welfare will lead the way in providing affordable housing for racing's people

The research showed that housing is least affordable for singles, particularly young singles, and lone parents (although there are relatively few in the industry). The greatest proportions of households finding housing unaffordable are in Epsom, followed by Lambourn, then Newmarket and the South West.

The study identified a need for short-term temporary housing for newcomers to a racing centre. This would be particularly useful for young singles.

There is a lack of suitable shared housing for singles. The report suggested a hostel unit with both private and communal space is most suitable. The hostel accommodation at a training yard in Lambourn was cited as a successful example and highly regarded. This provides individual front doors, en-suite bedrooms and also some communal areas. This type of accommodation could help to manage some of the difficulties identified with shared housing.

The research suggested that Racing Welfare could consider using existing housing stock more efficiently long term.

Racing Welfare is responding to these issues by reviewing its internal housing strategy to reflect the findings of the housing needs survey. This will include reviewing the current utilisation of its existing housing stock and developing opportunities to deliver additional young person's accommodation in the key racing centres. As part of this process Racing Welfare will be developing additional retirement housing in Newmarket. This will create

capacity to remodel some existing accommodation for use by younger racing staff in line with the priorities identified by the survey.

Through the use of Racing's Support Line and via social media channels, Racing Welfare will look to raise awareness of the different housing options available to racing staff and provide information and signposting about the local rental market. In addition they will work to develop strong links with local landlords in an effort to overcome some of the current perceptions and increase the supply of rental accommodation available to racing's workforce.

2. Racing Welfare will further develop their links with the racing schools to ensure students are provided with the information and support they need to manage tenancies and successful independent living

The research found that young people can lack the life skills to manage independent living and, in particular, to manage tenancies in the private rented sector. This makes it more difficult to secure housing as landlords stigmatise racing staff and are reluctant to let properties to them.

The Cambridge study recommends providing training or workshops at the racing schools about managing tenancies in the private rented sector. This could help to equip staff with the skills to maintain their tenancy and could address poor behaviour of tenants in the private rented sector. Landlords may be more willing to let to young tenants if they can demonstrate they have undertaken such training.

Racing Welfare intends to respond to this recommendation by supporting the development of a certificated training course on independent living and sustaining tenancies for students in the racing schools.

Racing Welfare will contact the racing schools and arrange a discussion to establish what the schools do already, what would add value and how the training could be implemented. With help from a housing support agency, tools will be developed for a certificated training course. Racing Welfare will work with the racing schools to deliver this course and to develop literature for students to take away to help them to successfully manage living in the private rented sector.

3. Racing Welfare will encourage and promote industry dialogue to address wider issues

Some of the research findings highlighted issues that are beyond the scope of Racing Welfare alone. For example, the study noted that it is hard to combine having a family with the split shift pattern common in the industry, which poses challenges for finding suitable housing as staff have to live close to their place of employment. This problem is compounded by people not being able to drive or to afford a car.

The report recommended industry-wide consideration of working patterns away from the split shift format. Rolling shift patterns or an alternative could prevent loss of staff from the industry who are unable to balance the demands of work in the industry with family life and may allow staff to live further away from work thus easing housing difficulties. The split shift system is incompatible with child care provision and this could be particularly relevant for

staff retention. Racing Welfare is happy to work with industry partners to facilitate more childcare provision tailored to racing families at an affordable cost.

The study also advocated for higher wages. The report highlights the perception that one of the reasons the industry suffers from staff retention problems is that there are relatively low rates of pay. Finding affordable housing is difficult on low incomes. Some employers offer low wages but also offer free or subsidised housing, but this is rarely for all members of staff, leaving some at a disadvantage in accessing affordable housing in the private market.

These recommendations cannot be taken forward by Racing Welfare alone, but need industry-wide consideration. Racing Welfare will facilitate a wider industry forum with a round table discussion, hosted by the BHA or NTF. The aim of this event will be to discuss the recommendations and work towards consensus around action points that can be taken forward to improve the housing affordability and circumstances of people employed in the horseracing industry.

Conclusion

The recommendations contained within the housing needs survey offer some practical and pragmatic actions. It will require a mix of policy, education and practical solutions if the industry is going to be successful in meeting the challenges identified and derive the benefits that positive action will deliver.

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