FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“WHAT ABOUT US?” Student Leaders call for student voices to be heard on MOD accommodation plans

Student Leaders say students should be consulted before any agreement to accommodate Ministry of Defence (MOD) personnel on campus is signed, with student safety remaining their priority.

The University of Essex Students' Union (Essex SU) has responded to a proposal to accommodate approximately 150 serving Ministry of Defence (MOD) personnel in The Houses on Colchester Campus for around two years. The University has indicated that The Houses would be used exclusively by MOD personnel for residential purposes, with no students living alongside them.

The proposal has been considered by the Vice-Chancellor and University Executive Committee and discussed by University Council, which oversees major University decisions. However, the final agreement has not yet been signed.

Essex SU's four elected Student Leaders strongly oppose the proposal and have raised serious concerns about student safety, the potential impact on the campus community and, importantly, the lack of meaningful student consultation.

Student Leaders believe students should have been given the opportunity to have their say before the proposal reached this stage.

Mina Comez, Essex SU President, and Chloe Jeffery, VP Education, have been in ongoing discussions with the Vice-Chancellor and senior members of the University Executive Committee, raising the Student Leaders' concerns and seeking further information about the proposal.

While these discussions have been constructive, the Student Leaders remain firmly opposed to the proposal and do not believe their concerns have been sufficiently addressed, particularly around safety, safeguarding and the potential impact on the student community.

With the agreement yet to be signed, Student Leaders believe it is important to make their position public and give students the opportunity to have their say.

Essex SU will now consult students, inviting them to share their views on the proposal, including any concerns about its potential impact on their university experience, safety and wellbeing.

Students are being invited to share their views through a short survey available on the Essex SU website at essexsu.com/what-about-us. This feedback will inform the Student Leaders' ongoing discussions with the University and will be considered at SU Council on 8 December.

Mina Comez, President of Essex SU, said:

“As an international student myself, I know that we bring our experiences with us when we come to Essex. For some students, experiences of conflict or interactions with the military can shape how safe and comfortable they feel around a military presence. That's something I don't think we can overlook.

“Essex is home to students from all over the world, each with their own experiences and understanding of what makes them feel safe. Something that might seem straightforward to one person could feel very different to another.

“That's why I have serious concerns about what this proposal could mean for student safety, wellbeing and a sense of belonging. Students deserve the opportunity to understand what's being proposed, ask questions and share how it might affect them before any agreement is signed.

“We've raised these concerns directly with the University and welcome the constructive discussions we've had with senior University representatives. But those discussions cannot replace hearing from students themselves. We'll continue to engage with the University and make sure students' views are heard and taken into account.”

The University has outlined proposed safety and operational arrangements, including measures relating to security, personnel conduct, access to facilities and incident management.

Student Leaders are seeking confirmation of which safeguards have been finalised, how they would work in practice and whether they sufficiently address students' concerns.

The Student Leaders' opposition to the proposal remains unchanged. Essex SU will continue engaging with the University to ensure students' views are heard before any agreement is signed.

ENDS

Notes to editors

- The proposal involves approximately 150 serving MOD personnel being accommodated in The Houses on the University's Colchester Campus for around two years.
- The proposal has been considered by the Vice-Chancellor and University Executive Committee and discussed by University Council. The final agreement has not yet been signed.
- The University has indicated that the accommodation would be for residential purposes only, with no military training or weapons on campus.
- Essex SU's four elected Student Leaders have raised concerns about safeguarding, student consultation and the potential impact on the campus community.
- Essex SU is an independent, student-led charity representing students at the University of Essex.

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