

Outrage over landlord's 'despicable' job advert

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A BUSINESSMAN who is set to acquire 200 private properties for rent in the Borders has provoked fury by advertising for a manager for whom having "the guts to kick someone between the legs as we evict them and their two-year-old child onto the street" would be an advantage.

That remarkable candidate requirement was spotted this week on the website of Mark Kennedy-Stewart who, with his wife, runs Caduceus Investments Ltd, a residential property investment company based in Falkirk.

The firm has hundreds of houses and flats across Scotland, a high proportion of which are rented out to workers from overseas.

The advert was immediately branded "despicable" by Lesley Crozier, the senior officer for social justice, equality and diversity with Scottish Borders Council.

Mrs Crozier, a member of the multi-agency Borders Migrant Workers Group, said the wording cast serious doubt on Mr Kennedy-Stewart's credentials as a "fit and proper" private landlord.

And, The Southern can reveal, the police are now investigating the entry to see if any offence, under legislation covering internet content, has been committed.

The advert states that the firm's property portfolio is located in Hawick and that the successful candidate will deal with all tenants, collect rents and other issues that may arise, as well as looking for properties with a view to purchase.

The candidate would also be required to deal with a wide range of customers from differing social backgrounds and would need to learn the legal aspects of the industry.

"While you will have a pleasant personality to deal with sales and client relationships, 'the guts to kick someone between the



MARK KENNEDY-STEWART

legs as we evict them and their two-year-old child onto the street' would be an advantage to the role."

The advert goes on to reveal the salary for the part-time post is £12,500 pro rata, with bonuses for property acquisitions.

Mr Kennedy-Stewart, a chartered accountant and former banker who founded his company in 2002, yesterday (Wednesday) defended his phraseology.

Speaking from his Edinburgh office, he believed the fact the wording was in inverted commas and italicised made it clear that the reference to violent eviction was humorous.

"Anyone who knows me knows I have a sarcastic sense of humour. I am not sorry for this and it has served me well in the past."

Mr Kennedy-Stewart went on: "The fact is there are sides to this business which can be unpleasant and we often deal with people at the lower end of the social spectrum. I, myself have been assaulted on three occasions by tenants.

"The advert was designed to humourously convey that a wide range of people skills are required and that, yes, the successful candidate could be sworn at and abused and to infer otherwise could be misleading. This can happen when Eastern European migrants, perhaps with a

limited command of English, come round to our offices. On one occasion, a foreign tenant mistook a television licence demand for an eviction notice and got very angry with our staff."

Mr Kennedy-Stewart's 'joke' could well backfire on him. Apart from the police investigation, under new Anti-Social Behaviour legislation, all private landlords and properties must be registered with the council. This system is designed to help private landlords having problems with anti-social tenants, but also to protect tenants from unscrupulous landlords.

Mrs Crozier: "Part of that process involves determining if a landlord is a fit and proper person and our partners in the police have a role to play in that assessment.

"The advert would appear to betray an utter contempt for tenants and, if this is indeed a joke, it is a very sick one."

Janice Cambridge, chief executive of the Scottish Borders Housing Association agreed. "Migrant workers are a vulnerable group and some who are now our tenants have some horrendous past experiences of private accommodation where as many as six have shared a single room. Evictions, particularly those involving children, are certainly no laughing matter."

Mr Kennedy-Stewart revealed he had unsuccessfully attempted to purchase several blocks of SBHA flats which are due for demolition in Stonefield, Hawick.

Asked why the council had no record of him or his companies on its register, he said he would be acquiring about 200 houses in Hawick from another private company "within the next few weeks".

"For reasons of confidentiality, I cannot say more at this stage. I can, however, confirm the position of Borders manager has been filled."