

HMOs IN SOUTHAMPTON

- City has just over 100,000 homes of which a little under 25% are rented from private landlords. Within the private rented sector 7,000 homes are estimated to be in multiple occupation. Therefore one in ten private homes is an HMO which is five times the national average.
- Stock condition survey (2008) shows that 38% of all private homes do not meet the Decent Homes Standard. Most commonly due to serious housing hazards (falls and fire) and poor thermal efficiency. Total cost to remedy estimated at £111M.
- Private rented homes generally in the poorest condition with a quarter having a hazard likely to result in harm needing medical treatment. Private tenants also experience higher levels of fuel poverty; 95% homes have potential to improve energy efficiency.
- Vast majority of HMOs in the city are either shared houses or bedsits occupied with 4 or more tenants. Most tenants (84%) are aged between 16 and 34 years.
- Many other issues are faced by tenants of HMOs including overcrowding and/or inadequate facilities, ineffective management and anti social behaviour.
- Poorly managed and maintained HMO properties can have an adverse impact on the local area and community. Most landlords manage their properties well and want to comply with the law.

Regulatory Services

Regulatory Services works with tenants, landlords and other partners to improve the private rented sector in the city; the aim is to keep homes warm, safe and secure.

Environmental Health Practitioners receive and investigate complaints about disrepair and management of private rented properties as well as completing a risk based reactive inspection programme.

Year	Number of service requests (total)
2009/10	602
2010/11	572
2011/12	555

The service works with responsible owners but will take enforcement action where appropriate to require landlords to improve their properties; a range of legislative powers is available including the Housing Act 2004.

HMO Licensing

Licensing is aiming to:

- Improve property conditions in HMOs; ensure that basic health and safety requirements are met; the property meets the basic standards i.e. number of bathrooms and kitchens

are appropriate for the number of tenants, the property meets fire safety requirements and has suitable and adequate management.

- Protect the health and safety of occupiers and minimise the impact on neighbourhoods through poorly managed and maintained properties.

Mandatory and Additional HMO Licensing:

- A Mandatory Licensing scheme has been in operation since 2006, it is citywide and includes the larger HMO properties where there are 3 or more storeys and 5 or more occupiers. There are estimated to be around 500 properties in the city most of which have been licensed.
- Since July 2013 the City Council has had a designation for Additional HMO Licensing in 4 wards (Bevois, Bargate, portswood and Swaythling). This means that all HMOs in these 4 wards need to be licensed.
- There are an estimated 4500 properties in the designated area and applications have been received for just over 1600. The applications are currently being processed; there is a team of officers receiving, completing inspections and assessing applications to issue licences. Licence conditions are attached to each licence and include the council's expectations for effective management. These will be monitored where needed.
- To date we have been accepting applications from responsible owners who have wanted to comply with the requirements. From March 2014 we will be moving to our enforcement phase where we intend to deal robustly with landlords who let properties in a poor or dangerous condition or who have poor management arrangements or who fail to make a licence application in a timely manner. This will include prosecuting where appropriate. We will use the intelligence we have to plan programmes of work to find unlicensed HMOs. We will work with partners where we are able to achieve this.
- To enable the scheme to be effective we have additional staff resource paid for by the licence fees including dedicated legal support and have just recruited an HMO warden who will work closely with residents, tenants and landlords to enable existing legislative provisions to be enforced with regard to issues such as letting boards (where needed).
- As far as other areas of the city, the legislation does not allow us to extend the existing scheme however the Cabinet report approved in February 2013 for the Additional HMO Licensing scheme set out 2016 as the date where we would consider a designation for other areas of the city. It would take a year to implement a further designation; this process is likely to start earlier than expected in July 2014.
- We work very closely with other council services i.e. planning and legal services and have a good working relationship. We have also been working with landlord groups in the city through our newly created consultative forum and are in the process of arranging our first stakeholders forum which we hope interested organisations, local residents groups and tenants will attend
- The service has always found it difficult to develop a maintained dialogue on a collective basis with tenants other than students. There are regularly low numbers of responses with customer satisfaction questionnaires and we received very little feedback to the consultation for HMO Additional Licensing.