

# Council 28 November 2024

Meeting recording: [(1) Cambridge City Council - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/@camcitco/streams)

## Motion 6e. Improving Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) in Cambridge

Council notes:

* That private rented sector housing is generally considered the worst quality housing in the UK.
* In relation to licensable HMOs:
  + That houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) provide an important, positive first step for many Cambridge residents to move into and find work and start their journey on the housing ladder;
  + That dwellings being converted to HMOs for over 6 people must obtain planning permission for change of use to HMO usage (a sui generis use) and that HMOs for five or more persons not forming a single household must obtain a licence from the City Council, enabling conditions to be inspected and enforced, along with building control approval;
  + That a list of all HMOs licensed by the council is publicly listed on the council’s website, to enable tenants to check whether their landlord holds a suitable licence. Renters can access support from the Council’s Environmental Health team regarding private sector renting and support with poor conditions in their housing. As a result of this licensing work, the Council has identified several landlords with unlicensed properties, and used its enforcement powers to issue penalty notices, including financial penalties totalling more than £8,000 in 2023.
* In relation to unlicenseable HMOs:
  + That smaller dwellings, with three or four persons forming two or more households, count as an HMO but do not require a license to operate or planning permission (as they fall under Permitted Development), however these may require building control approval;
  + That all private sector landlords are required to meet legal standards, even if they are not renting licensed HMOs. However, it is clear that conditions in some HMOs are not acceptable
  + That the council’s Environmental Health team already works hard to identify smaller HMOs in poor condition, but without a central register of such properties, this can be challenging;
  + That currently, many tenants are afraid to complain about poor conditions for fear that they may then be evicted and lose a reference for a future rental, though we note that the proposed reforms to evictions would assist in strengthening tenants' rights in this area, which is very welcome;
  + That because demand for HMOs exceeds supply, there is a risk that more poor quality HMO provision will be available and that the government’s proposal to make the Decent Homes standard apply to the private rented sector is therefore very welcome.

Council Believes:

* That huge progress will be made in terms of private sector housing and strengthening renters’ rights if the Renters’ Rights Bill 2024 is enacted by the Labour government. This includes the ending of Section 21 ‘no-fault eviction’ notices, streamlined mechanisms to challenge unfair rent increases, and the provision of a national register of landlords and properties being let, which the council would particularly welcome.
* That efforts are being made within the emerging local plan to ensure that all HMOs that require planning permission meet minimum space standards, including seeking to retain the measures already in place in Policy 48 regarding positive HMO development and Policy 50 regarding residential space standards, subject to proper consideration through the current plan making process.
* That increased council intervention in the standards of planning and operation of HMOs is appropriate, particularly so long as Cambridge is experiencing an overall shortage of housing, and that the council must optimise and apply the range of power that it has, and may gain in the future, across its services in order to secure a fairer deal for tenants.

Council Resolves:

* To ask officers to prepare a report on the case for and feasibility of one or more Article 4 directions within the city boundaries, which would remove Permitted Development rights for smaller HMOs (currently Use Class C4) and instead require planning permission for all new builds and for change of use for existing housing stock to be used as HMOs for more than two people and to report back to a suitable member meeting by the summer of 2025.
* To ask the Chief Executive to write to Cambridge Labour MP Daniel Zeichner to inform him of this Council’s support for the provisions in the Renters’ Rights Bill relating to the many positive outcomes this will entail, including ending of Section 21 eviction notices and a Private Rented Sector Database and that such provision is in line with the motion on ‘Private Rented Sector in Cambridge’ passed by the Council in October 2022.