

COUNCIL MEETING – 30 JANUARY 2024

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

1. Dr Sunila Lobo to ask the Lead Councillor for Housing:
Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation

In Redlands there are a large number of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), with the Ward having some of the town's highest levels of hazardous properties, anti-social behaviour, and rubbish and recycling issues.

Currently, only 'large HMOs' containing at least five residents are covered by the national HMO licensing scheme, however the majority of Redlands' HMOs are small terraced properties in the student area, with up to four occupants. As they are classed as 'small HMOs', they do not currently require a licence.

Other university towns such as Oxford and Bristol have successfully used HMO licensing to improve the standard of accommodation, take enforcement action to protect tenants and improve the condition of neighbourhoods. Will the Lead Councillor for Housing support my campaign and introduce a licensing scheme for all HMOs in the East Reading area ?

REPLY by Councillor Emberson Lead Councillor for Housing.

The Council currently operates a licensing scheme for larger houses in multiple occupation with 5 or more occupants; this is the national mandatory licensing scheme. The Housing Act 2004 contains provisions for the Council to designate discretionary licensing schemes, either for smaller houses in multiple occupation or for the private rented sector as a whole.

Discretionary Licensing is a tool which the Council can use to improve conditions and management in the private rented sector. The Corporate Plan and the Housing Strategy commit the Council to review evidence in relation to housing conditions and review the need for discretionary licensing schemes as part of wider actions to improve the quality and safety of housing for residents.

Officers have commissioned a report to look at housing conditions across the private rented sector and related complaints about anti-social behaviour. The results of the survey are currently being assessed against the requirements of the Housing Act and will be reported to the Housing, Neighbourhoods & Leisure Committee and I expect that a consultation into designating some discretionary licensing schemes will commence in due course.

The aim of the schemes proposed is to drive change and provide better homes for our residents, which national evidence shows has positive impacts for health and for families, better educational outcomes.