# Oldham Council pushes for stronger HMO regulations as numbers surge



Oldham Council is calling for increased powers to regulate houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), following a significant rise in the number of shared housing units in the borough. At a full council meeting held on April 9, 2023, councillors voted almost unanimously in favour of pressing the government to revise existing HMO licensing rules, highlighting a sharp increase in the number of HMOs, which has nearly doubled over the past five years.

Currently, national legislation exempts HMOs accommodating up to five tenants from requiring a local council licence. This exemption, according to members of the Oldham Council, has contributed to issues such as overcrowding, additional pressure on local services, and a deterioration in the quality of housing. The council's Civic Centre was the venue for the discussions, where concerns regarding housing conditions were fervently voiced.

Elaine Taylor, the deputy leader of the council and the portfolio holder for housing, expressed the council’s view that "there should be a level playing field for all HMOs no matter their size so that all of our residents can live in good quality housing." She noted that in many instances, substandard HMOs are modified to accommodate as many tenants as possible, focusing on maximising financial returns rather than ensuring safe and comfortable living standards.

Liberal Democrat councillor Sam Al-Hamdani echoed these sentiments, sharing his past positive experiences living in HMOs. However, he pointed out a prevailing trend of inadequate conditions, stating, “The whole system is just broken.” He remarked that applications for certain properties often fall beneath acceptable standards for basic human rights, citing extreme cases where living conditions are untenable, such as homes with no windows or inadequate space.

Labour councillor Peter Davis also weighed in, comparing certain HMOs to “chicken coops” and asserting that they pose long-term health risks to residents. His comments reflect a growing concern that a multitude of substandard HMOs could adversely affect the well-being of those residing in them.

The call for regulation follows a recent protest in Shaw, where local residents demonstrated against the influx of HMOs, which they claim are transforming community spaces and businesses into low-quality shared housing for profit. This local sentiment indicates a wider community concern about the impact of HMOs on long-term residents and the overall fabric of the community.

Other boroughs have begun implementing an Article 4 direction, which would grant local authorities more control over the establishment of new HMOs. However, Taylor noted that Oldham is currently 'just below the threshold' to introduce such measures. In response to these challenges, the council plans to reach out to local MPs and the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to advocate for modifications to the national regulations governing HMOs.

One notable case highlighted at the meeting was the rejection of a proposal for a large 22-bed HMO in a former health centre located in the town centre, which failed to meet acceptable living standards. This incident underscores the urgent need for regulatory action as the council seeks to ensure housing quality and protect the interests of its residents.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/201198/information_for_landlords/258/houses_in_multiple_occupation_hmo> - This URL explains the definition of HMOs and the legal requirements for licensing them, corroborating the article's description of national legislation and its impact on HMO regulation.
* <https://notreallyheremedia.com/news/oldham-reporter/council-turns-down-22-bed-hmo/> - This article provides details about the rejection of a large HMO plan in Oldham due to substandard living conditions, which supports the councillors' concerns about housing quality.
* <https://www.oldham.gov.uk/download/downloads/id/7825/draft_local_plan_december_2023.pdf> - The Oldham Local Plan outlines objectives for creating healthier communities and improving housing standards, aligning with the council's call for better HMO regulations.
* <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/35/contents> - This legislation page details the Housing Act 2004, which includes provisions for HMO licensing and management, supporting the article's reference to national HMO laws.
* <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/article-4-directions> - This page explains Article 4 directions, which some councils use to control HMO development, reflecting Oldham's consideration of similar measures.