

## **TASK AND FINISH GROUP ON HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION**

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### ***What is the Commission being asked to do?***

1. To consider and agree the terms of reference for the Task and Finish Group on Houses in Multiple Occupation, which is scheduled to report back to the Commission's meeting on 12 November 2014.
2. To note the membership of the Task and Finish Group

### **Reason for this Report**

At the last meeting of the Improvement and Review Commission (Minute 41 – 2 April 2014) it was agreed that 'A Task and Finish Group in respect of a review of the current operation of the Council's policy towards house in multiple occupation, be established'. It was noted that a scoping report was to be brought to the next meeting of the Commission, hence this report.

The Commission is now asked to determine which of the options and aspects of the Council's Houses in Multiple Occupation operations outlined in the Background and Issues paragraphs below, the Group is to scrutinise, from which ultimately recommendations are to be made by the Commission to Cabinet for implementation.

### **Background and Issues**

Houses in Multiple Occupation are an essential step on the housing ladder for many and in some cases, the only housing option available.

Many people are unable to access alternative accommodation due to many reasons including, but not limited to:

- Affordability issues:
- Offending history and not being able to access supported housing;
- No family to reside with or family relationships broken down;
- Economic migrant to an area (i.e. job in the area but no family); and
- Inability to live independently – need others to support.

Without HMO's we would have a much larger problem with rough sleeping / overcrowding and 'sofa surfing' as well as a greater demand on social housing.

Additionally HMO's provide an invaluable and not insignificant means of accommodation for University / College Students studying in towns away from the family home town.

The 2008 Private Sector House Condition Survey and local knowledge indicates that there are circa 2000 HMO's in the District. The Council has a voluntary accreditation scheme in respect of private sector tenanted properties; circa 200

properties are listed of which 95% are HMO's. This is in addition to the 80 HMO's registered under the mandatory licensing scheme.

The definition of Houses in Multiple Occupation under the mandatory licencing scheme; 'properties that are of three storeys or more and are let to five or more tenants' is to be noted. The Group may wish to examine the legislation and protocols operated by the Council in enforcing this scheme. Along with considering the extension of the licensing scheme to include those HMO's that are not statutorily required to be licensed.

Reading Borough Council's consideration of such a licensing scheme extension was presented to the Council's High Wycombe Town Committee back in January 2013. An informative Information Sheet issued by the Town Committee (3/2013 1 February 2013) subsequent to that meeting is most useful in defining HMO's from the Planning and Licensing viewpoints.

Licensing extensions of the key areas of a Council's District where HMO's are clustered has been considered by some authorities.

Members, if minded to scrutinise such a licensing extension, may wish officers to organise a consultation of, or visit to, Milton Keynes Borough Council; who have recently rejected such and Aylesbury Vale District Council who are currently considering implementation.

The recent amendments to Local Authorities' obligation to deal with Homelessness in that private rented accommodation (of which HMO are deemed such) can be offered to a homeless person and cannot be rejected as unsuitable in favour of social housing, may also have a bearing upon the work of the Group.

At the 2 April 2014 meeting Commission Members Councillors D H G Barnes, I Bates, A E Hill, Mrs W J Mallen and T Snaith all indicated their willingness to serve on the Task and Finish Group, subsequently Councillors R Wilson (also now a Commission member) and R B Colomb have also volunteered.

Councillor D H G Barnes indicated his willingness to serve as Chairman of the Task and Finish Group which is advocated by the Commission Chairman Councillor R H W Gaffney.

It is envisaged that the Task and Finish Group will complete its work and present its recommendations to the 12 November 2014 Commission meeting.

### **Conclusions/ Recommendations**

Including all of the above issues proposed Terms of Reference to read as follows:

- To establish the level of provision, in both quantity and quality, of Houses in Multiple Occupation within Wycombe District:

- To consider the current effectiveness of statutory legislation and voluntary codes utilised by Wycombe District Council in respect of HMO's: and
- To explore the benefits of the extension of licencing of HMO's beyond that required by statute, the cost effectiveness of such and whether this would result in better standards of provision.

It is for Commission Members to decide whether these proposed Terms of Reference are in order for the Group. Members may wish to consider what evidence supports the need for the review of each particular issue. Is there any evidence of dissatisfaction with the service or under-performance?

What are the outcomes the review is seeking or expecting to achieve and how will it benefit or impact on the local community? The Commission needs to be sure that the issues considered under the review do not tie up officers on work which has little impact. Additionally will the outcomes assist in achieving corporate priorities? And if so which ones?

### **Corporate and Financial Implications**

The Corporate and Financial Implications of any recommendations of the Group will be considered by the appropriate officers during the work of the Group and at the drawing up of the Group's final report and recommendations to the Commission in due course.

### **Next Steps**

To set up a timetable of meetings of the Group once Terms of Reference established.

### **Background Papers**

Housing Fact Sheet No 1 (revised December 2006) Houses in Multiple Occupation.

Housing Fact Sheet No 2 (revised December 2006) Mandatory Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation.

Housing Fact Sheet No 3 Houses in Multiple Occupation – Prescribed Standards for Occupation for Licensable HMO's.

Houses in Multiple Occupation – Amenity Standards – July 2007.

Protocol for Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation – October 2008.

Notes of the Planning & Sustainability Portfolio Advisory Group 10 December 2012.

Report and Minutes of the High Wycombe Town Committee Meeting of 22 January 2013 and subsequent Information Sheet 3/2013 issued 1 February 2013.

Report and Minutes of the Improvement & Review Commission 4 September 2013 re Recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task and Finish Group + Cabinet response to these 10 February 2014.

It is envisaged that the above background papers not featured within the appendices to this report will be shared with Task and Finish Group Members prior to their first Group meeting.