

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's)

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Purpose of Report

To provide members with information in relation to HMO's (Houses in Multiple Occupation) and to seek their views.

Public Interest

HMO's are an important element of our housing stock and it is necessary to ensure there is sufficient capacity to meet increasing demands. It is also equally important to ensure that the location and quality of HMO's are properly assessed to ensure that there is no adverse impact upon residents or surrounding properties.

Recommendation

That members consider the officer's report and provide direction as to whether they wish officers to embark upon the production of Supplementary Guidance in relation to future proposals for HMO's.

Background

Area South members have requested that a report/discussion paper be brought before them to enable them to get a better understanding of the issues associated with HMO's. This request followed the consideration of planning applications at recent meetings.

HMO's provide much needed housing accommodation, mainly for single people. The increase in demand for such accommodation from those on lower wages/low income has increased significantly since the introduction of changes to the way in which single people receive housing benefit for private rented accommodation. Individuals under 35 years of age no longer receive housing benefit sufficient to pay for a one bed flat and as such they are often reliant upon operators of HMO's to meet their housing needs. HMO's also play an important role in housing those people that have been previously been in a care environment or have mental or physical health issues.

Whilst HMO's do tend to cater for the needs of those in lower income groups it must be remembered that they also provide accommodation for professional/skilled workers. There is a significant demand from those working in the area on fixed term contracts for employers such as Finmeccanica/Westlands or Yeovil District Hospital.

The Role of Planning

Planning permission isn't currently required for a property where up to 6 unrelated individuals are living as a single household.

If the property is to be occupied by more than 6 individuals then it is necessary for the landlord to make an application to change the use of the premises. An application allows the impact of the increased use to be considered and the key issues are likely to be:

- Availability of parking
- Impact upon character of area and amenity of other residents
- Suitability of property to accommodate the number of tenants

As a property owner can convert a dwelling into an HMO for 6 or less tenants without planning permission then it is not currently possible to carry out any assessment of the planning merits of the change.

The Role of Environmental Health

The council's Environmental Health officers work with the operators of HMO's to ensure that the accommodation is of an appropriate quality with the key issue being that of tenant safety. They have implemented a licensing regime that considers issues such as fire safety but also assesses other issues such as ventilation, overcrowding, toilet/bathroom facilities etc. If an HMO is considered to be substandard then they do have the ability to take enforcement action to prevent the accommodation being used.

Consideration

Whilst planning permission is required for those HMO's with more than 6 occupants the vast majority of HMO's are not subject to the scrutiny of a planning application. This can lead to a proliferation of HMO's in certain areas which can in turn have a detrimental impact upon the amenity of existing residents.

Some local authorities have sought to address this issue by issuing what is known as an Article 4 Direction. This measure ensures that the creation of an HMO, regardless of the number of occupants, automatically requires planning permission. It does not mean that permission will not be granted but it does ensure that the merits of each HMO are properly considered. It also allows the council to monitor the location of all new HMO's and assess the cumulative impact of such uses in a particular area. Supplementary planning guidance could then be created to help officers and members assess such applications.

Options

- 1 Continue to deal with planning applications for the larger HMO's (>6 occupants) as they arise but provide greater clarity on the key issues.
- 2 Progress an Article 4 Direction that will require all future developers of HMO's within Yeovil to obtain planning permission.

Financial Implications

No immediate obvious implications.

Equality and Diversity Implications

The requirement to make a planning application for all HMO's would not have any implications.