

**CABINET – 25 FEBRUARY 2016
QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

Agenda item 5 refers

1. **Mrs S Sullivan, 85 Morley Grove, Harlow to Councillor Mark Wilkinson, Portfolio Holder for Environment**

In April 2015 Harlow Council introduced an Additional Licensing Scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). The Additional Scheme applies to all HMOs in Harlow that are not covered by the national mandatory scheme (the mandatory scheme applies to all HMOs of three or more storeys and occupied by five or more persons forming more than one household).

Under the Additional Scheme, licences are issued on an annual basis. That ensures the finances involved are evenly spread and flexibility maximised for the benefit of both landlords and the Council. However, Harlow Council has continued to issue five-year licences to properties under the mandatory scheme. This means that the statistically most dangerous properties are now subject to less frequent scrutiny and landlords of the larger HMOs have an advantage over their smaller competitors.

Can Harlow Council please revise its policy and issue licences for the mandatory scheme for one year at a time? This would better protect the tenants in these properties and ensure equality of competition between landlords.

Reply from Councillor Mark Wilkinson, Portfolio Holder for Environment

The inspection frequency for all HMOs in the regulatory framework is determined by risk assessment, regardless of whether licences are issued annually or once every five years. This means that HMOs in the mandatory scheme with even the lowest risk ratings are inspected more frequently than once every five years.

The mandatory HMO licensing scheme was set out at the time of its introduction to align with current central government policy.

As with most local government services, the diminishing resources available to focus on HMO issues have recently been focussed on implementation of the Council's discretionary Additional Licensing Scheme, prioritising bringing previously unregulated HMOs into the regulatory framework.

I am advised that the law appears to allow an annual licensing fee to be charged for mandatory HMO licences, however I am conscious that there are risks and costs associated with change to such a regulatory regime. I will ask Officers to report on the balance of costs and benefits involved in such a proposal within the next municipal year.