



Houses in Multiple Occupation
Licensing and Standards
A GUIDE FOR TENANTS AND LANDLORDS

Colchester Borough Council

www.colchester.gov.uk

The **Private Sector Housing Team** at Colchester Borough Council is committed to improving the condition of properties in the private sector, and to preventing homelessness. They provide advice and help to landlords and tenants about housing health and safety issues.

What is a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO)?

An HMO is any dwelling which is lived in by people, as their main home, who do not form a single household and who share some or all facilities. This now includes:

- Shared student accommodation
- Hostels and some Bed and Breakfast accommodation
- Houses and Flats in multiple occupation

Landlords: contact the Private Sector Housing Team for advice about your property.

- It might be an HMO and require a Licence
- It may qualify for a fire-safety grant. See also **'Landlords' short guide to fire precautions in HMOs'**

So if you live in a house or flat with someone who is not your partner or a family member, then you probably live in an HMO.

Why is the Council interested in HMOs?

Tenants: The Private Sector Housing Team will quickly investigate any concerns you have about conditions in your home. You can contact us in confidence and we won't give out your details.

HMOs often have poorer physical and management standards than other privately rented properties. The people who live in them are often among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of

society, and HMOs are often their only housing option. Without proper checks, HMOs can become unsafe places in which to live – so it is vital that they are properly regulated and routinely inspected.

High risk properties must be inspected regularly and it's these that often need to be licensed.

What sort of HMO needs a licence?

An HMO **must** be licensed:

- If the property is three or more storeys high, and
- it's occupied by five or more people who form two or more households, and
- some amenities are shared (e.g. bathroom, kitchen etc).

This is a *mandatory licence and its intention is to make sure that councils are aware of high risk HMOs, and to ensure that only fit and proper people run and manage them.

Landlords: *If you own or manage a property that fits this description and it's not licensed then you should contact the Private Sector Housing Team immediately.*

- **Mandatory** means it is required by law

*Failure to licence this type of HMO can lead to prosecution, a maximum fine up to **£20,000** and perhaps disqualification from running HMOs entirely.*

At present Colchester Borough Council does not intend to operate a discretionary licensing scheme for any other HMOs, although they will **all** be inspected in time.

What does Colchester do about HMOs in its district?

The owner of an HMO is responsible for ensuring that the property is adequately maintained, managed and, if necessary, licensed. If a property is visited, and recommendations made to the landlord are ignored, the Private Sector Housing Team can use their powers to enforce the law.

Everyone deserves a safe and healthy place to live in and the Private Sector Housing Team regularly inspects HMOs within the district, using the national Housing Health and Safety Rating System to determine possible risks to tenants. These inspections are prioritised so that the higher risk premises (the licensable HMOs, and non-licensable HMOs with a poor history) are inspected more often.

What is checked when an HMO is inspected?

- **Fire safety:** including fire detection and alarms, emergency lighting, and a safe escape route.
- **Space standards:** measuring the size of rooms – are they large enough?
- **Amenities:** adequate bathing and cooking facilities.
- **Gas safety:** is there a current Landlord's Gas Safety Certificate? Appliances **must** be inspected annually by a qualified **GasSafe** engineer.
- **Furniture safety:** does any furniture the landlord has provided meet fire safety standards?
- Any **disrepair** or defects.
- The general state of **cleanliness**, and the **management** of the HMO.

How to contact the Private Sector Housing Team

Phone Colchester Borough Council's **Customer Service Centre** on **01206 282581**. **Textphone users** please dial **18001 01206 282581**.

Email us on housing.private@colchester.gov.uk



If you need help with reading or understanding this document, please take it to our Customer Service Centre at Angel Court, High Street, Colchester, or phone Colchester **(01206) 282222**, or **Textphone 18001 01206 282222**.

We may be able to provide a reading service, translation, or any other format that you may need.