

Committee Report Checklist

Please submit the completed checklists with your report. If final draft report does not include all the information/sign offs required, your item will be delayed until the next meeting cycle.

Stage 1

Report checklist – responsibility of report owner

ITEM	Yes / No	Date
Councillor engagement / input from Chair prior to briefing	Yes – Cllrs Sexton & Gibson Email to Cllrs Doran & Attewell	3/11/2025 13/11/2025
Commissioner engagement (if report focused on issues of concern to Commissioners such as Finance, Assets etc)	Yes – DM has been involved in Project meetings and aware of report	3/11/2025 – fortnightly project meetings
Relevant Group Head review	Yes – LON & SM aware in HM's absence	3/11/2025 14/11/2025
MAT+ review (to have been circulated at least 5 working days before Stage 2)	Yes, also discussed with Legal 24/11/2025	24/11/2025
This item is on the Forward Plan for the relevant committee	Email to Committee Services	11/11/2025
	Reviewed by	
Finance comments (circulate to Finance)		
Risk comments (circulate to Lee O'Neil)	Lee O'Neil	18/12/25
Legal comments (circulate to Legal team)	LH	19/12/25
HR comments (if applicable)	n/a	

For reports with material financial or legal implications the author should engage with the respective teams at the outset and receive input to their reports prior to asking for MO or s151 comments.

Do not forward to stage 2 unless all the above have been completed.

Stage 2

Report checklist – responsibility of report owner

ITEM	Completed by	Date

Monitoring Officer commentary – at least 5 working days before MAT	L Heron	19/12/25
S151 Officer commentary – at least 5 working days before MAT	T Collier	5/12/2025
Confirm final report cleared by MAT		

Community Wellbeing and Housing Committee

13 January 2026

Title	An update from the Environmental Health (EH) Department on Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)
Purpose of the report	To inform and assure
Report Author	Fidelma Bahoshy, Joint Senior Environmental Health Manager
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	No
Exemption Reason	Not applicable
Corporate Priority	Community Addressing Housing Need Services
Recommendations	Committee is asked to consider the contents of this report and note progress with ongoing work to deal with HMOs and the planned next steps.
Reason for Recommendation	Not applicable

1. Executive summary of the report

What is the situation	Why we want to do something
The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the ongoing work about the control and oversight of HMOs within Spelthorne and to outline the planned next steps and actions.	The increasing proliferation of HMOs in the Borough and the standards of HMO properties are areas of concern for residents and Councillors. There has been an increase in the number of applications received by the Environmental Health service and in reports about properties operating as HMOs without the necessary licences.
This is what we want to do about it	These are the next steps
The Council has set up a Project Team to understand better the situation, review what powers we have, increase resourcing where needed and co-ordinate actions across Service areas. Planning, Community Safety and Environmental Health Teams are working closely together to co-ordinate action to deal with	This project is ongoing with fortnightly meetings attended by Councillors, a commissioners' representative, Senior Management and officers from different departments to review progress and plan action. Future steps include robust enforcement action against non-compliant landlords, work to clear the backlog of HMO

unlicensed and unlawful Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and address anti-social behaviour issues arising from those properties.	licence applications, the formation of a Landlords Forum and a proposed Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
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2. Key issues

2.1 Following concerns raised by residents and Councillors, a project team was set up with the aim of improving the standards and management of HMOs across the borough. While the Council recognises the role of HMOs as a source of affordable accommodation, concerns have been raised about their impact in local communities, the quality of some HMO accommodation, and the current effectiveness of Council enforcement procedures. Councillors have emphasised that in aiming to deliver more affordable housing solutions, the quality and management of new housing must be addressed. They have also expressed concern that the development of HMOs in the borough needs to be controlled more effectively. One way in which this can be done is through the introduction of stricter planning controls through Article 4 Directions.

2.2 Staff from several Environmental Health, Planning and Community Safety are actively engaged in managing and improving conditions in the private rented sector, including HMOs. The demand on these services has increased as the number of licence applications for HMOs has grown in recent years as shown in Table 1.

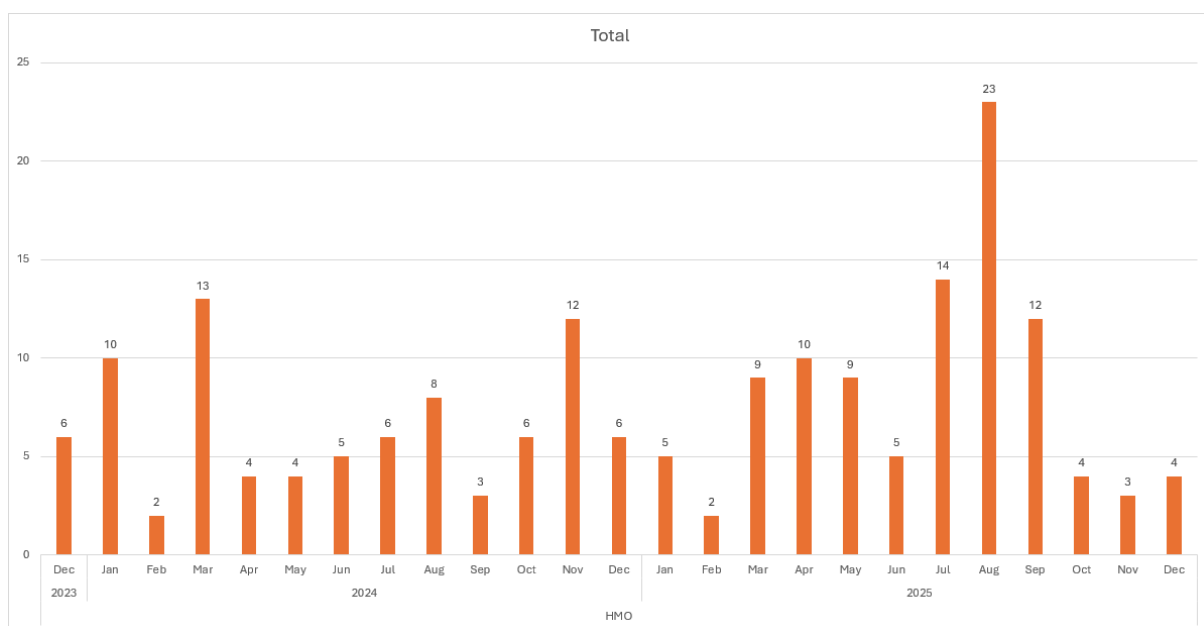
2.3 **Table 1**

2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
33	77	115

*The data for this table runs from 1 October to 30 September.

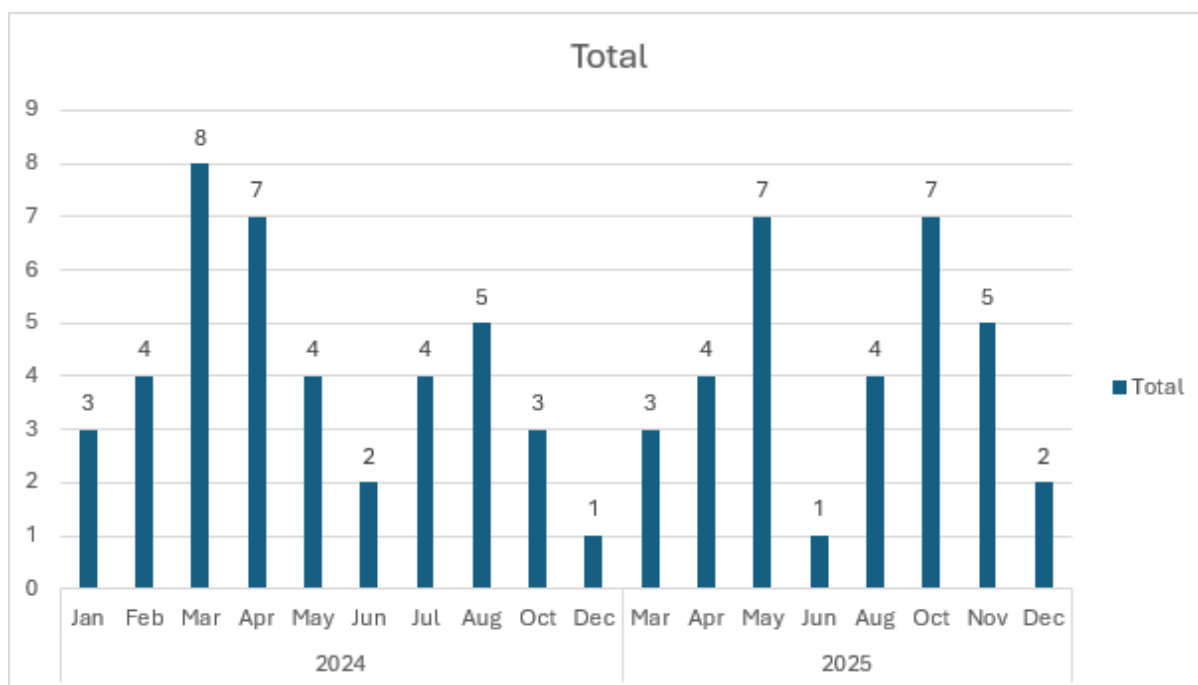
2.4 Graph 1 below outlines the trend in HMO licence applications received by the EH service over the last two years:

Graph 1



2.4.1 In response to the recent surge in demand, the EH Service has taken on two contractors to help tackle a backlog of applications and complaints. It was initially anticipated that the contractors would clear 10 cases per week. Graph 2 below shows that although steady progress has been made on dealing with licence applications, progress has been slower than expected because of the complexity of some cases; a significant increase in the number of complaints / allegations about potential HMOs and the number of new applications received.

2.4.2 **Graph 2**



2.4.3 There has also been a significant increase in the number of complaints / allegations about potential HMOs.

Table 2

2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
23	70	99

*The data for this table runs from 1 October to 30 September.

These complaints are received from either residents who suspect an HMO is operating in their road or via ward Councillors. The intelligence received is often based on the number of cars associated with an address or where different individuals have been seen coming and leaving the property. We always visit the address of each allegation and speak to the residents. Many do not fall within scope of the licensing regime, for example some have been family homes with numerous adults owning their own vehicles and instances where a resident was renting out their driveway for parking.

2.4.4 As of 18 December 2025 around 620 outstanding service requests are allocated to the EH Residential team, with the balance of workload distributed across the EH Commercial, Licensing, Pollution Control and Business Support teams

2.4.5 There has also been a steady increase in the number of compliance inspections that are being undertake as shown in table 2 below.

Table 3

2022/2023	2023/2024	2024/2025
14	21	34

*The data for this table runs from 1 October to 30 September.

2.4.6 One of the major obstacles when carrying out HMO inspections and inquiries is access. Most visits will require notice to be given to the landlord and tenants. Even with notice given, often nobody answers the door, and once inside individual tenants may not answer questions or permit access. There can also be difficult issues around staff safety depending on the residents and information received from partner agencies. This means in practice that thorough inspections can take several protracted visits.

2.4.7 **Table 4**

As of 15 December 2025, there are:

Number of License licensed HMOs	121 (18 of these are renewals, the rest are new applications)
Applications within the system	146

2.4.8 In dealing with new HMO applications EH must grant a licence with appropriate conditions where:

- the house is reasonably suitable for occupation having regard to amenity levels, available living space and general health and safety standards,
- the management arrangements are satisfactory, and

- the licensee, manager and those involved in the running of the property are fit and proper persons.

2.4.9 The vast majority of licensed HMOs within the borough are compliant and do not present a risk to those who live within them nor a nuisance to their neighbours. It is important to note that the number of complaints about HMO accommodation remains low. The total number of complaints received by EH relating to residential properties in general (includes HMOs and single occupation properties) was 831 in the period between 1 October 2024 and the 30 September 2025, with only 65 of those complaints relating to HMOs. These figures do not include allegations about potential HMOs as outlined previously.

Resourcing Challenges

- 2.5 The EH team has faced staffing difficulties over the last 18 months. There is a recognised national shortage of Environmental Health and Housing Standards Officers. This is highly skilled area of work; the responsibilities of the role are significant and the pressure that officers face is high. Spelthorne competes with London boroughs to attract candidates. There is anecdotal evidence that recruitment has been impacted by Local Government Re-organisation as officers who would normally move between Surrey authorities are remaining at their respective authorities. Pressure on staff resources is likely to increase further following the introduction of the Renters Rights Act in 2026 placing additional responsibilities on local authorities.
- 2.6 Contact has been made with neighbouring authorities to enquire if any of them have additional capacity to assist but none are currently in a position to do so.
- 2.7 There are two current vacant posts in the EH Residential Team, one of which has been vacant since July 2024 with three failed recruitment exercises. The posts are currently backfilled by contractors however the substantive salary levels are lower than contractor rate resulting in a gap in capacity to deliver the service as required.
- 2.8 The EH department received approval to expand the team in April 2025. Two additional Housing Standards Officer posts were advertised. One post has been filled however the attempt to fill the second was unsuccessful. This post is currently out to advert for a second time with interviews scheduled for mid-January 2026.
- 2.9 As noted in Point 2.4.1, funding was also agreed in September 2025 to appoint contractors on a short-term basis to clear the backlog of HMO related work. They are making progress, but HMO licence demand levels have continued to surge.

2.10.1 Improved Partnership Working

Environmental Health has worked closely with the Community Safety team to strength multi-agency action via the Task and Co-ordinating Group (T&CG). This group is chaired by the Community Safety team and is also attended by Surrey Police, law enforcement officers and other agencies as appropriate.

EH refer HMOs to this group in the following circumstances:

- I. Cases where there are multiple different issues at a property and where these issues overlap with other teams / agencies
- II. Cases where we are aware of an incident involving the police or Community Safety
- III. Cases where we need the support of other agencies such as the police, for example where we have concerns about officer safety when visiting.

2.10.2 Improved communication and public awareness were identified as an objective of the project. As part of this workstream we have taken the following steps:

- I. The Landlords' Guide to Standards for HMOs has been revised and updated. This is available on our website.
- II. A new guidance document for landlords about anti-social behaviour has been written and published on our website.
- III. The licensing condition for anti-social behaviour has been strengthened.
- IV. A new online form for HMO applications is under construction with assistance from colleagues in the ICT department. This is due to be live before the end of December 2025.
- V. A letter has gone out to all HMO licence-holders from the Leader outlining the Council's commitment to ensuring good standards within HMOs.
- VI. A meeting for Ashford and Staines Residents' Associations took place on 3 November 2025 to provide an update to residents, explain the legal parameters in which the Council must work and proposed next steps.
- VII. A Landlords' Forum is planned for early 2026, the intention of this forum is twofold, to update landlords on the Renters Rights Act and remind them of their legal obligations for running HMOs within Spelthorne.

2.10.2.1 Streamlining the processes for taking enforcement action.

The EH team has been working with colleagues in Legal to review the procedures for financial penalties for those failing to comply with the HMO rules and regulations and to ensure that they are fit for purpose. Enforcement action against non-complaint landlords is progressing, with the team pursuing civil penalty notices in these instances instead of pursuing prosecutions.

2.10.3 A review of the Environmental Health processes is also underway exploring digital solutions to workload management. In addition to this, digital options are being explored for identifying unlicensed HMOs as an additional tool to identifying non-compliance.

2.10.4 The risk assessment process used for determining the length of HMOs licences has been reviewed. Guidance notes have been to ensure improved consistency across officers. In addition, consistency exercises are run twice per year, and it is mandatory for all officers tasked with completing the risk assessment to participate in these.

- 2.11 There appears to be growing hostility within the community about the presence of HMOs and some frustration that the existing legislative framework is inadequate. There is no mechanism for neighbouring properties to object to a licence and there is no process of consultation with neighbours. This would need legislative change and is outside the scope of the project.
- 2.12 The team will always aim to follow up complaints from neighbours about issues such as noise and anti-social behaviour which will also be taken into account as part of the risk assessment process when considering new licences. The team must be able to substantiate any complaint. Licences cannot be refused because of neighbour perceptions or fears.
- 2.13 The HMO licensing process cannot at present consider the following issues which are frequently raised with EH:
- parking,
 - the density of HMOs within an area,
 - the use of HMOs to house vulnerable people placed in emergency or temporary accommodation by other Local Authorities, asylum seekers or for halfway houses for recently released prisoners, and,
 - party wall agreements, however information is available to signpost both developers and member of the public to further guidance.

Planning Considerations

- 2.14 The Environmental Health team has been working closely with colleagues in Planning. On 29 August 2025 an Article 4 Direction came into force for three wards within the Borough (Staines, Ashford North & Stanwell South, and Stanwell North Wards). This Direction removed the permitted development rights to convert a dwelling house (C3 Use) into a small House of Multiple Occupation (HMO) for up to six individuals. Any dwelling house first occupied as a small HMO on or after the 29 August 2025 in those three wards, will require planning permission for conversion. Planning permission is already required for the conversion of a dwelling house into an HMO occupied by seven or more individuals; this remains unchanged.
- 2.15 The Council has made a further Article 4 Direction covering the remaining Wards in the borough. This will come into effect on 13 March 2026 and will remove this permitted development right across all remaining Wards in the Borough.
- 2.16 The Planning Department are working on a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) relating to HMOs to guide any planning applications following Article 4 Direction. New applications will need to be assessed against impacts at a neighbourhood and street level. The Supplementary Planning Document will provide the quantitative assessment tools and provide a clear set of policies to assess the impact of all new HMO proposals at the local level.
- 2.17 The HMO SPD will sit alongside and supplement the new Local Plan. It cannot come into force until the Local Plan has been adopted.
- 2.18 **Future Considerations for the Project Team**

The Housing Act 2004 allows Councils to extend the mandatory licensing regime for HMOs with two additional options:

- 2.19.1 Additional Licensing – this only applies to HMOs and is an extension of mandatory HMO licensing. An additional licensing declaration would mean that all HMOs (not just those with 5 or more occupants) would require a licence.
- 2.19.2 Selective Licensing - applies to all tenanted properties (whether in single or multi occupation), except social housing. All privately rented properties would require a licence.
- 2.19.3 The EH service would require resources to research and evaluate these options and consult with residents and landlords. Criteria governing areas for additional and selective licensing might include:
- low housing demand,
 - significant and persistent anti-social behaviour,
 - poor housing conditions,
 - high levels of migration,
 - high levels of deprivation and,
 - high levels of crime.
- 2.19.4 Spelthorne currently operates mandatory licensing only and therefore must ensure that there is adequate resourcing and enforcement for this core service before considering additional licensing measures.

3 Options appraisal and proposal

- 3.1 Not applicable, this report is for noting only.

4 Risk implications

4.1 Operational Issues

- 4.1.1 The project has been impacted by resourcing constraints, with loss of key staff and significant challenges recruiting to posts. Suitably qualified and experienced contractors are also difficult to source, and the costs of such cover are high. We have approached a range of recruitment agencies to assist us meet this need and ensure best value for money, we have also approached colleagues from other authorities within Surrey.
- 4.1.2 HMO work has been prioritised above other workstreams within the Environmental Health department, including preparations for the introduction of Renters Rights.

4.2 Reputational Damage

- 4.2.1 Residents have expressed concerns about delays in issuing licenses with some escalating complaints to their MPs. Every effort is made to ensure that residents and elected members and the MP are kept up to date, particularly where the complexity of a case has caused delays.
- 4.2.2 There is a risk that poorly handled enforcement or communication could damage trust, especially among landlords or tenants.

4.3 Meeting all legal obligations

While the EH team has diverted resources to meet the requirements and deadlines within the project plan, this has had an impact on other statutory work that the team is responsible for including statutory nuisance

investigations, other private sector housing work, tall buildings work in conjunction with Surrey Fire and Rescue Service and the control of park home / caravan sites.

5 Financial implications

5.1 Following CPRC approval on 8 September 2025, an additional £93,000 Budget was allocated to the Environmental Health department to secure resources to clear the growing backlog of HMO applications, HMO compliance checks and service requests (SR) including allegations of properties potentially operating as HMOs without a licence.

5.2 The first contractor started on 13 October 2025: the second on 20 October. The funding is also used to employ a casual member of staff working part-time (18 hours per week).

5.3 **Table 5** Staffing Costs (estimated):

Officer	Hours per week	Hourly rate	Weekly cost	Cost of contract
Contractor 1	37	£57.50	£2127.50	£25,530
Contractor 2	37	£57.68	£2134.16	£49,085.68*
Casual Officer	18	£25.10	£451.80	£10,391.40*
Additional management support	2	£77.70 (inclusive of oncosts)	£155.40	£3574.20*
			Total	£88,581.28

*Estimated cost until the end of March 2026

The remaining funding will be used to extend the contract of Contractor 1 and supplement management support.

5.4 The contractors are working to a target of processing 10 applications per week and supporting officers to investigate allegations. They are also giving technical advice to junior staff and helping with their upskilling needs.

5.5 Any proposal to extend the mandatory licensing scheme will have a significant further impact on resourcing. Additional work will need to be done on the costs and feasibility of extending the system and implementing additional controls. It is noted that Woking Borough Council is introducing additional licensing across its borough from 5 January 2026 for a period of five years. The scheme requires all HMO properties with 3 or 4 tenants from 2 or more households to be licensed.

5.6 Options to change the current software system to enable HMO applications to be integrated directly into the database are under review. This would reduce data entry task freeing up officer time for other tasks.

The initial set-up cost of this with the service provider (IDOX) has been estimated at £4,950 and the yearly maintenance fee is currently £6,600. The yearly maintenance charge would be added to the fees paid by the applicant, and it would add an additional £95 to each application.

No final decision has been made about this and options for this are still under evaluation. If a decision to proceed is made it would take several months to implement with support from ICT.

6 Legal comments

6.1 There are no specific legal implications arising directly from this report. All enforcement action must be underpinned by a suitable policy and must comply with all applicable regulations and legislation.

Corporate implications

7 S151 Officer comments

7.1 The S151 Officer confirms that all financial implications have been considered and that the recommendations are fully funded from within the current and in the 2026-27 draft Budget.

8 Monitoring Officer comments

8.1 The Monitoring Officer confirms that the relevant legal implications have been considered.

9 Procurement comments

9.1 There are no procurement considerations directly arising from this report.

10 Equality and Diversity

10.1 The report is for noting only.

11 Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

11.1 This report has no impact on sustainability or climate change issues.

12 Other considerations

12.1 The Renters Right Act

The Renters Rights Act received Royal Assent in late October 2025 and imposes a duty on local housing authorities to enforce certain requirements of housing law as opposed to the power to do so at present. There will be an increased burden on the Environmental Health Residential team both in the preparation for this Act and in enforcing it which could impact on HMO work.

13 Timetable for implementation

13.1 The project timeline is being reviewed and updated regularly. Most of the work is due to be completed by April next year. Factors outside our control that may impact and delay process including the introduction of the Renters Rights Act and adoption of the Local Plan.

14 Contact

14.1 Fidelma Bahoshy – f.bahoshy@spelthorne.gov.uk

Please submit any material questions to the Committee Chair and Officer Contact by two days in advance of the meeting.

Background papers: There are none.

Appendices: none