

# ***London Borough of Bexley***

## ***News Release***

**For Immediate Release**

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### **LICENSING SCHEME PLANNED FOR HOUSES OF MULTIPLE OCCUPATION**

Bexley is developing a new local licencing scheme for Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) designed to support tenants, landlords and residents.

The Council will start a consultation in September on licencing regulations for properties that are used as HMOs. A multi-agency approach is also being developed to enable faster and more 'joined-up' enforcement.

Currently under nationally applied legislation only HMOs with three or more storeys, containing five or more people in two or more households and with shared facilities, need a licence. Bexley has 22 of these.

The licencing options planned for Bexley would take the form of a general licencing scheme for all smaller HMOs as well as possible 'selective licencing' of all privately rented accommodation in a defined area.

Steps are also being taken to adopt local planning powers to put in place an 'Article 4 Direction' in the borough. Once introduced, this will bring smaller HMOs under the same planning enforcement rules as larger properties.

Leader of the London Borough of Bexley, Cllr Teresa O'Neill OBE said; "We understand residents' have some concerns around HMOs and it is unfortunate that on occasion these properties are used simply to maximise profits by a small minority of private landlords. We must recognise however, that there is also a need for well managed HMOs in the borough. Many are used by students or young professionals, some are there to ease the enormous housing pressure that we are currently under. But we must have some better local regulation in place. This new licencing scheme is being proposed in the current absence of any nationally applied rules.

"We have looked into our options carefully and we think these changes will ensure that HMOs and the private rented sector can be regulated in a sensible way and will give us powers we need to safeguard tenants, support the majority of our private landlords who are very responsible, and also to reassure our residents."

The decision to proceed with the new licencing scheme was taken by Cabinet Member for Adult Services, Cllr Brad Smith this week (12 August). The decision will

now be subject to a seven day Council 'call-in' period. Following that the next stage will be a 10 week consultation period on the new licensing schemes, during which the Council will engage with tenants, landlords, managing agents and other interested parties. Following consultation the licensing schemes could be introduced from early in 2017.

The 'Article 4 Direction' means that in future all HMOs would need planning application approval. The nature of the legislation means that this would come into place late next year

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Data shows that Bexley currently has approximately 1,400 small HMOs and has experienced a significant increase in the last seven months. We do however have a much lower figure compared than other London boroughs.

The introduction of the licensing scheme will generate income that can be used to improving standards and support more effective multi- agency enforcement.

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