

Houses in Multiple Occupation Best Value Review – Questionnaire

Response by The Canterbury Society

For the purpose of this questionnaire, Houses in Multiple Occupation/shared housing refers to a property occupied by three or more unrelated individuals.

Q1. Do you think there are issues relating to Houses in Multiple Occupation (shared housing)? *(for example, noisy neighbours, problems with litter or rubbish on street, unkempt gardens, inconsiderate parking, anti social behaviour).*

Yes – all the above are experienced by our members.

In addition there are problems which relate to **not having neighbours**. There may be no one in the street with whom children can play and no one with whom to exchange neighbourly chats and mutual help. Of course some students try to be ‘good neighbours’, but it is not the same as families, or older people, living next door to one another and helping each other.

Q2. If yes, how often do you or your organisation experience these issues?

	Experienced daily	Weekly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never a problem
Noisy neighbours		X			
Problems with litter or rubbish on the street		X			
Unkempt properties/ gardens		X			
Inconsiderate parking		X			
Antisocial behaviour		X			
Other problem (please state)		X			
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‘Organisations’ do not experience such problems. However, we are fairly sure that among our many members, these problems are experienced on a regular basis to varying degrees depending partly on location.

However, please note that what we see as the basic problem is not listed here.

That problem is that when the level of small HMOs reach a certain level (over 25%?) of the housing in an area such problems grow to a disproportionate extent and continue to grow disproportionately as the level of HMOs increases further. The reason for this is that the growth of HMOs in an area destroys the sense and the influence of a settled and neighbourly local community.

Q2b. If you have answered 'yes' to any of the issues above, did you or your organisation report them?

Our individual members report them to the police, the local council and landlords and to the Universities (most of the complaints relate to students, although that is at least partly because students are the overwhelming majority of occupants of small HMOs). There is, however, a strong sense locally that this achieves nothing or very little. Consequently there is a very high level of under-reporting of problems. A common local comment is "It's a waste of time".

Q3. The council is considering introducing a requirement for planning permission for small shared housing in Canterbury city centre. How would this affect you or your organisation either positively or negatively?

We strongly support this and regard it as absolutely vital that this is done. The reason should be evident from our comments above. The level of problems rises disproportionately as the proportion of HMOs increase. At a certain level it produces the response that no long term residents will stay in or wish to move to such areas. Housing choices for local families are already affected by the student blight which affects some streets.

Q4. What experiences (good or bad) have you or your organisation had of the city council in addressing issues relating to shared housing?

The City Council has together with the Universities and Student Unions in recent years made serious attempts to address some of these problems. This has involved a number of actions designed to provide information and advice to students in, or moving to, HMOs.

Although this attempt is very welcome and has had some small impact, it has also to be said that it has no more than "scratched the surface" of the problems and most long term residents would say the problems are now as bad, or almost as bad, as ever.

Q5. How can the council improve its operational approach to tackling issues relating to shared housing?

It could implement the requirement for planning permission if a house is to become an HMO.

- Q6. Which of the issues relating to shared housing do you or your organisation think the council should tackle as a priority? *(please rank in priority order 1 = highest priority/5 = lowest priority)*

Issue	Priority(1-5)
Noisy neighbours	
Problems with litter or rubbish	
Unkempt properties/gardens	
Inconsiderate parking	
Anti-social behaviour	
Other <i>(please explain)</i>	

All these are serious issues for our members and the order of priority would differ depending on the personal experience and location of housing etc of our members. However, we feel that the ones most commonly referred to are noisy neighbours, anti-social behaviour and (particularly at the end of terms and the academic year) problems with rubbish.

- Q7. How do you think the council could best tackle these issues? *(Please tick one)*

Working with communities	
Rules and regulation	
Enforcement	

All three actions above have a part to play. But, at the present, the key action available to the council is to act through the requirement of planning permission for smaller properties to become HMOs. We regard this as vital if the growth of the problems considered above is not to continue in Canterbury.

We would recommend that any property applying for permission to become an HMO should be refused such permission if the level of HMOs within a given radius (200 metres?) of that property has already reached 20% of the total residential properties.

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