



CABINET WORKING PARTY SELECTIVE LICENSING/HOUSES OF MULTIPLE OCCUPATION

4th March 2026 at 10.00am

Present: Councillors Aisthorpe (Chair)
Councillors Bonner, Jackson, Patrick and S Swinburn.

Officers in attendance:

- Carolina Borgstrom (Director of Economy, Environment and Infrastructure)
- Zoe Campbell (Senior Scrutiny and Committee Advisor)
- Dee Hitter (Head of Regulation and Sustainability)
- Drew Hughes (Head of Strategy Policy and Performance)
- Paul Silvester (Data Scientist)

Also in attendance:

There were no members of the press or public in attendance at the meeting.

CWP.18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence received for this meeting.

CWP.19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interests made from members with regard to items on the agenda for this meeting.

CWP. 20 MINUTES

RESOLVED - That the draft minutes of the meeting of the Selective Licensing/Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMO) Cabinet Working Group held on 30th January 2026 be approved as a correct record.

CWP.21 HMO DATA SCIENCE ACTIVITY

The working party received a report that set out a pilot data led approach to support identification of small non licensable HMOs in North East Lincolnshire.

A member raised a concern about the effectiveness of door-knocking for validation, suggesting residents might not cooperate. Ms Borgstrom explained that validation could range from simple data verification (e.g., using electoral roll canvassers) to full proactive inspections, the latter requiring significant resource investment and specialist skills.

The Chair enquired about the level of confirmation required before influencing policy. Ms Borgstrom advised that numbers alone would be insufficient for wider regulation; evidence of negative community impact on family housing availability or increased anti-social behaviour would also be needed. Mr Hughes confirmed that initial analysis did not show a direct correlation with existing anti-social behaviour data.

A member expressed their opposition to the current selective licensing approach, arguing that its focus on micro-areas was misplaced and did not address the real needs of more challenging urban areas. The Chair noted that the current approach had been unanimously approved previously based on extensive evidence. The member disputed the Chair's reference to a member's previous stance.

The Chair reiterated the need for robust evidence before expanding any policy, including selective licensing, additional licensing or Article 4 directions. Ms Borgstrom highlighted that any recommendations requiring new resources would need to be presented to Cabinet for approval.

Ms Hitter mentioned the upcoming Renters Rights Act, which included a mandatory landlord database due in October 2026, potentially aiding future verification efforts.

A discussion ensued regarding whether to wait for the Renters Rights Act implementation or proceed with immediate validation. A member enquired about current staff capacity for enforcement. Ms Hitter clarified that newly recruited staff were primarily for compliance with the Renters Rights Act and managing existing workloads, not for proactive HMO inspections, which demanded different skill sets and significant time.

Mr Hughes suggested utilising casual election canvassers for initial data validation through door-knocking could provide a lower cost option

A member asked if new staff would address substandard housing inspections. Ms Borgstrom confirmed increased capacity would be required to respond to complaints across the private rented sector, including HMOs. However, the team was not currently resourced to carry

out proactive inspections for properties where no concerns around housing standards had been raised.

The Chair advocated for immediate action, supporting the recommendations to commence door-knocking for validation which the panel agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED –

1. That the update be noted
2. That officers proceed with validating the identified 'very high' and 'high' likelihood small HMO properties through door-knocking, exploring the use of casual staff such as election canvassers.

CWP.22 HOUSE OF MULTIPLE OCCUPANCY PROGRESS REPORT

The working party received report updating on progress with its review of HMOs.

A member highlighted the severe shortage of accommodation for single people and small families, noting a lack of suitable planning applications. Ms Borgstrom explained that developers often preferred building larger family homes due to viability, leading to an increase in larger HMO conversions to meet market demand for smaller units. The member suggested using Section 106 contributions to fund social landlords or council-led provision of such accommodation. Ms Borgstrom outlined the limitations of Section 106, including the amount generated and the local need for all types of social housing.

A member proposed recommending to Cabinet that the Council began developing its own social housing to meet demographic needs. The Chair supported this, suggesting the housing needs assessment be brought back to the group to inform the Local Plan regarding one-bedroom accommodation.

A member highlighted the complexities of the Council becoming a house builder. He suggested exploring bringing empty homes back into use as a potentially more cost-effective solution, seeking government funding. Ms Borgstrom advised that the empty homes strategy was scheduled for review by scrutiny later in the year. She highlighted challenges such as high repair costs versus low property values and a lack of immediate funding to bridge this viability gap.

A member referred the poor state of many empty properties, potential council tax revenue if brought back into use, and issues with absent landlords. Ms Borgstrom reiterated the significant cost (£40-60k) to

upgrade some of the long-term empty homes to rental standards, often exceeding the property's value, creating a substantial viability gap.

A member enquired about council schemes to assist empty home owners. Ms Hitter confirmed information was available on the website and a dedicated officer worked with council tax data to contact owners, but financial viability remained the primary barrier. Ms Borgstrom confirmed the absence of an active empty homes grant scheme.

The member also asked about loans for homeowners for property maintenance. Ms Hitter confirmed existing schemes were fully subscribed and actively helping homeowners.

A member stated that landlords generally wanted to rent properties, and empty homes often had complex underlying issues. He noted that scrutiny had discussed this issue for many years without resolution, suggesting radical interventions like selective demolition might be necessary.

A member countered that some large, international property owners might be unaware they own specific problem properties.

Another member suggested renovation of Victorian terraces (citing examples in Doncaster and Manchester) as a potentially cheaper alternative to demolition. A member noted that higher property values in Manchester made such projects more viable than in North East Lincolnshire.

The Chair summarised the consensus that empty homes were a significant issue. Ms Borgstrom confirmed the empty homes strategy was scheduled for scrutiny later in the year. A discussion took place on whether the empty homes strategy should be reviewed by this working party or scrutiny. Ms Borgstrom suggested the topic did not fit within the terms of reference of the working party, but the group could acknowledge the issue and support the scheduled scrutiny discussion.

The discussion moved to the housing needs assessment and its link to the Local Plan. The Chair proposed the assessment returned to the working party for specific focus on HMOs and one-bedroom accommodation. Ms Borgstrom explained the Local Plan process, the independent nature of the Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA), and how members could influence its interpretation.

In conclusion, the working party agreed after listening to all the evidence that the approach to take to help reduce the problems with small HMO's across the borough was carry out proactive HMO inspections. The working party unanimously agreed to recommend to Cabinet that additional resources be considered for undertaking proactive HMO inspections.

It was agreed that the empty homes strategy and the housing needs assessment (specifically focusing on HMOs and one-bedroom accommodation) should be referred to a joint panel of the Communities Scrutiny Panel and the Transport, Infrastructure and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Panel for further review.

RESOLVED –

1. That the report be noted.
2. That it be recommended to Cabinet that additional resources be considered for undertaking proactive HMO inspections.
3. That the Empty Homes Strategy and the Housing Needs Assessment be referred to scrutiny (suggested as a joint panel of the Communities Scrutiny Panel and the Transport, Infrastructure and Strategic Housing Scrutiny Panel) for further review.

CWP.23 NEXT STEPS

The working party discussed next steps, which included a report being submitted to a future Cabinet meeting.

RESOLVED – That the next steps be noted.

There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed at 11.12 am