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# CRACKDOWN: Licensing to improve quality 'Change will make tenants homeless'

**TIGHTENING UP ON SHARED HOMES**

IN 2010, Oxford City Council resolved to extend licensing to every HMO. The first stage came into force last January and required landlords of all three- or more storey HMOs

and all two-storey HMOs occupied by five or more people to obtain a licence.

The second stage comes into force today. Landlords of all two-storey or single-storey houses or flats

occupied by three or four people who are not related will be required to obtain a licence.

Any landlord who does not licence their property faces a fine of up to £20,000.

**HUNDREDS of people in Oxford could be made homeless today as new housing rules come into force, landlords have warned.**

City letting agents and landlords fear Oxford City Council regulations, which mean that houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) with three or more sharers must now get a licence, will force many residents out of the city.

Landlords must now have their property inspected for £362, make any necessary alterations and renew the licence each year.

The same rules for three-storey houses or two-storey houses of five people or more were introduced last January.

But many tenants say they are being forced out as landlords choose not to make the changes. Jonathan Williams, 44, a freelance musician, has lived in Littlemore with two friends for two years.

He said: "The landlord won't stump up the cash to adhere to the new standards and so we have to be evicted."

"There are lots of groups of three or four professionals, like us, who now cannot find anywhere to live."

The aim of the new system is to improve standards in the rented housing market.

One in five Oxford residents currently lives in a shared home and a house condition survey in 2005 revealed 70 per cent of Oxford's estimated 5,000 HMOs were "unsafe".

Council officers get more than 2,000 complaints a year about HMOs.

But Mr Williams said: "This is nonsense. A landlord could kick out four hardworking professionals and get in a mum, dad and their 15 kids instead."

"We have lived carefully and responsibly and now we're being kicked out."

Frank Webster, of Summertown letting agents Finders Keepers, said: "We believe the council already has sufficient powers to tackle any isolated problems caused by the very small minority of irresponsible landlords or mismanaged properties."

"We don't see the need for a whole lot of extra draconian licensing. Will it affect those landlords who are already dodging

■ Rhianne Pope

the system? No it won't. And it will lead to more shortage in affordable housing for professionals."

Rayna Taylor, lettings manager at Headington-based QB Management, said the company was now advising landlords to opt for families rather than house-sharers.

One landlord who contacted the *Oxford Mail* had rented a four-bedroom city centre house to four people for 15 years.

The man, who wished to remain anonymous, said the new guidelines meant he was now only able to keep two people in the house due to the size of the rooms.

He said: "My small terraced house is like thousands of other similar properties built 100 years ago."

"It is practically impossible to extend these houses easily. The implications are that I will have to give notice to half my tenants. Hundreds of other landlords could be in a similar position."

Fellow landlord Karim Easterbrook said: "I'm totally in favour of the council making sure all fire and safety regulations are kept. But this method seems bizarre. Homelessness will increase on a massive scale."

Oxford City Council is the first authority in the country to introduce a scheme which covers a whole city and requires every HMO to be licensed.

City council board member for housing Joe McManners said: "HMOs have long been recognised as being a particular problem in the city, with many examples of poor-quality homes which are, in some cases, being poorly managed."

"These damage the reputation of good landlords. We are determined to put this right and stop those doing the right thing being undercut by cowboys."

He added: "Licensing every HMO will help drive up standards for everyone."

City council deputy leader Ed Turner said: "The aim is not to decrease the number of HMOs. We just want to improve the quality."

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■ FEARS: Director of Finders Keepers Frank Webster Picture: Andrew Walmsley