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ASK THE EXPERTS

The lettings agent

I own a three-bedroom townhouse that I've been letting for several years to different groups: a family, a couple and a colleague or three professionals sharing. What does the new HMO (houses in multiple occupation) planning legislation mean for me?

H Rodgers, Newcastle

The creation of "student ghettos" in some towns and cities has led to the creation of a new planning law, which came into effect on April 6. This will affect many landlords such as yourself, as properties to be rented to three or more sharers will now require planning application to obtain "Class C4" status. A property that was already let as an HMO on April 5 automatically assumes this status; conversely, if the property was let to a family, but you now intend to let to three or more persons (made up of more than two households), then a planning application will need to be made — at a cost of about £300 and plenty of hassle. I suggest that you speak to your local planning officer for more information.

✦ *Frank Webster is a partner at the Oxford branch of the lettings agency Finders Keepers; finders.co.uk*