



HMO public registers – Guidance for local authorities

As you will be aware, local authorities have a duty under the Housing Act 2004, Section 232 to maintain an up-to-date register of properties within its jurisdiction that have been granted House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licences, and ensure that that list is accessible to the public.

We have evidence to suggest that, during recent unrest, there have been incidences of individuals sharing details of properties taken from HMO registers. This has then been used to build lists of places to target as suspected accommodation for people seeking asylum. This follows a pattern we have seen within the organised far right, namely a move from focusing on asylum hotels to targeting HMOs, on the (mis)understanding that 'HMO' is synonymous with dispersal asylum accommodation. As such, we believe that any property that has an HMO licence, or indeed that appears visually similar to HMO-licensed properties, may be at greater risk.

We wanted to make local authorities aware of this trend, and encourage those who maintain their public register in an online format to consider moving to a different format. This could mean, for example, implementing a procedure whereby those wanting to access the register must apply by sharing their full identifying details. Applicants would then be able to access the list at an in-person meeting. Section 232 of the Housing Act 2004 simply states that “the register must be available for public inspection and persons may take copies thereof (on payment of a fee).” We believe that this duty would be satisfied by a system that allows individuals to view the register in person, having made a note of their details.

Please be aware that, where the details included in the public register were previously available in an online format but have since been taken down, they may still be accessible using tools like the Wayback Machine, which enables users to view previous versions of webpages. If your authority deems this an ongoing risk, you may wish to consult with people with relevant IT knowledge, and contact providers including the Wayback Machine with a takedown request.