

HOUSING POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS IN RESPONSE TO THE PCC HMO SURVEY

I'd like to start by saying thank you for including me in this process and providing me with an additional opportunity to consolidate our students' rights. From analysing the recent PCC HMO survey results, I have a few thoughts and recommendations. This response is as an Elected Officer and PRS Governance Board member. We will seek further student consultation on creating formal priorities on housing and are grateful for the opportunity to do so.

Recommendation One - HMO licensing should be strengthened.

The need for this is evident in at least 33% of tenants stating that their property isn't safe and well managed, and 30% indicating that their property isn't in a good standard of repair and condition.

- We could improve this by necessitating three-year renewals instead of five-year renewals for HMO licences. This would help to ensure that the information kept on HMO properties is accurate and relevant. Moreover, by doing this, HMO's will more likely be kept to a higher standard since landlords want to keep their licence, raising living standards. This will also set a best practice precedent that may inspire other councils to do the same.
- PCC should enhance the criteria for their regulation of HMOs by setting more stringent specifications for building standards and their history of HMO leasing as a prerequisite for being awarded an HMO licence. Thus, landlords are forced to keep their properties better maintained for the benefit of tenants and living standards in Portsmouth.
 - This could be measured via an increased quantity of inspections for HMO properties.
- Receipts should be provided by landlords for deposit deductions as a condition of an HMO licence, specifically deductions for cleaning and repairs. The need for this is exemplified in 22% of respondents stating that they fear repercussion from their landlord consequent to asking for repairs. Further, 88% of respondents said that the council should intervene in HMOs more. By implementing this, landlords are held more to account for the way they treat tenants, and a fairer system is born.

Recommendation Two - There should be stricter policies on HMO repairs.

Repairs in HMOs are a prevalent issue, shown in a large proportion of tenants saying that their repairs are delayed, or that they feel intimidated by their landlord when asking for repairs.

- This could be done by mandating repairs to be completed within a specified time frame, with penalties for those failing to meet said timeframes without evidence of unavoidable delays (such as a verifiable email).

Ergo, resolving issues in HMOs become more efficient and tenants feel safer and more comfortable in living within said premises. This also stresses the importance of timely repairs, which is quintessential in maintaining adequate living standards.

Recommendation Three - There should be better reporting structures available for students.

The discrepancy between landlord and tenant responses is significant. For instance, 98% of landlords feel confident in their property conditions. This is a stark contrast to 33% of tenants disagreeing that their property is safe and well-managed, and 30% of tenants indicating that their property is in a poor state of repair and condition. These patterns of divergence are also visible in the age of respondents for both landlords and tenants. Subsequently, it can be inferred that the perceptions of an adequate property condition differ between the two groups, which causes less investment and reduced living standards for tenants.

- We should establish clearer definitions on what constitutes suitable living conditions and ensure understanding of both tenants and landlords of maintaining those living standards

Recommendation Four - Landlords proven to be responsible for subpar living standards (such as poor building conditions) should receive harsher penalties (e.g fines).

Recommendation Five - PDPLA, PCC, UoP and UPSU should do more to increase community cohesion.

- A large number of residents stated that they have faced problems from HMO tenants.
- Negative perceptions towards HMO tenants.
- Perceptions from tenants are okay regarding the relationship with the community - clear divergence.

To conclude, UPSU is pleased to be involved in further conversations about how we can increase living standards within Portsmouth.

For example, we can collaborate by, but not limited to:

- Representing student needs.
- Helping publicise content.
- Providing new solutions.
- Utilising pre-existing connections.
- Create and disseminate campaigns.
- Lobby entities to create positive change.

We have developed a student-specific survey in partnership with the University to collect more data on a granular level. This will be going out shortly and we would appreciate your support in this activity. I hope that we keep the dialogue open to make students' tenants' and landlords' lives better, since we have swathes of expertise from numerous fields, in addition to direct feedback from students. In terms of the next steps, I believe that we should discuss these recommendations and how they can be best implemented.

These will improve the lives of tenants, and as a result, landlords, in Portsmouth.

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