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Governance & Civic Services

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To: Members of the Cabinet

Date: 14 February 2013
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Dear Councillor

CABINET - THURSDAY 14TH FEBRUARY, 2013

I refer to the agenda for the above meeting and now enclose the following report(s) which were unavailable when the agenda was printed.

Agenda No.

Item

9. **Housing in Multiple Occupation and Flats Supplementary Planning Document** (Pages 343 - 346)

Copy of the presentation given to the Planning Committee on 6 February 2013 by Amanda Brown, Planning Consultant attached

Yours sincerely,

G. BAYLISS

Director of Corporate Commissioning

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Steve Latham HMO SPD

Good evening councillors and officers. My name is Amanda Brown and I am a town planning consultant with 23 years practice working in councils and private sector. I advise many HMO landlords across the country. Because of this I have a lot of current experience of the new HMO legislation and how this is being interpreted by councils and the planning inspectorate. I represent Mr Steve Latham one of your most respected local HMO landlords, and the 100+ landlords he advises through his letting agency - Concentric Lettings in Waterloo.

Steve provides homes for over 150 local people in his shared houses. Some are vulnerable, many are older and separated, many work in low paid jobs and many in the docks. Steve receives 3000 requests for rooms in shared houses each year. We all know this demand is increasing not least with the amendments to the benefit system and a requirement for people to move to accommodation appropriate to their needs and a restriction on the payment of room only benefit to single people under 35. Mr Latham is recognised by the council for the high quality of accommodation he provides and in restoring and using many derelict attractive Victorian properties.

Firstly we welcome the planning department's shift in policy that previously would only accept proposals for 2 bed flats and finally an acknowledgement that shared accommodation is needed and provides a crucial role in the Districts housing provision. The previous stance has involved Mr Latham in extremely long and costly Public Inquiries.

We have commented formally on the first Draft. However there remains deep concerns that the SPD is not clear; confuses flats and shared HMO accommodation trying to impose the same standards on bedsitting

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rooms, and if taken literally, will result in future proposals at least be taken through the expensive appeal process or being abandoned as unviable with investment going instead to adjacent Districts. We wish to work with the council to ensure a workable document that is realistic.

We are concerned about the following

- 1 The SPD suggests that the planning officers can agree proposals during pre application discussion - I understand that this can only ever be informal advice not binding on the council.
- 2 Fundamentally there should be separate guidance for flats /houses and HMO accommodation. A flat is a separate C3 dwelling / planning unit with separate facilities and services and can be sold or let on a self contained rate to LHA tenants. A HMO comprises bedsitting rooms with varying facilities and all sharing kitchens or living rooms or bathrooms. They can only be let on a room rate, cannot be sold / have finance raised on them and have shared utilities. This accommodation is not let on the basis that the tenant lives only in the room. There is confusion in the SPD over bedsitting rooms within the planning definition of a HMO and studio flats.
- 3 In reality the SPD requirements relate only to larger HMOs which are materially different to C4 HMO for 6 or so tenants that does not require planning permission if it was previously a dwelling. This is not made clear.
- 4 Noise insulation for flats and HMO should be set out separately. The guidance suggests that each individual bedroom within a HMO is to be noise insulated on all walls ceiling and floor as if it were a separate dwelling. It has been established at inquiry that a

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HMO is 1 separate planning unit / dwelling not several. If any noise insulation work is required it would be between the dwelling and any adjoining properties not between individual rooms in a shared house. The principle of this was established at the Inquiry. The requirements for build regs are different for a shared dwelling than for a flat. This level of unnecessary work makes HMOs unviable when most HMOs are in Victorian properties with thick walls that already achieve building regs standards. It exceeds new build requirements.

- 5 What noise readings have been taken and reports provided to justify the policy – it is not enough to say that houses with many people make a lot of noise and cause disturbance – so do large houses with large young families and it is not borne out in inspector's decisions.

- 6 The guidance suggests that terraced properties cannot be used for HMOs – or that only if stairs are adjoining stairs in the adjacent building – most terraces are rows of houses with the same layout – confirmation is required what is meant and which terraced houses are suitable for those HMOs which are materially different to C4.

Taken literally, this precludes most of the most suitable accommodation in the district being used for HMOs and providing the much needed accommodation. Kitchens and living rooms are located along 1 wall, and hall and stairs along the other which repeats along the terrace. This cannot be changed.

- 7 We seek confirmation that the SPD does not preclude bedrooms with roof lights within HMOs as long as there is access to communal living rooms with windows. Liverpool requires them to

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be cill height. Clearly there are many bedrooms in roof spaces with roof lights across the district. Does the no bedroom with roof lights rule also apply to all houses / flats and extensions of houses? Clearly the vast majority of HMO are C4 HMO and alterations to roofs are within PD rights which do not need consent. How will this policy be implemented on existing HMOs. If converting from a dwelling to HMO can existing bedrooms in roof with roof lights no longer be occupied? The document states that HMO occupiers should have access to rooms with outlook – later it says that all rooms should have windows and not roof lights. The licensing and housing teams accept roof lights and access to communal rooms with windows.

- 8 Side distance of 12m to two storey flank wall of adjacent building when considering side windows. Please confirm this does not relate to distance to boundary treatment which is not 2 storey.
- 9 Accessibility is unclear - does the SPD suggest HMOs in 3 and 4 storey buildings require a lift to be installed to give access throughout. This makes no sense whatsoever. Are you requiring ramps to all HMOs? Indeed does this apply to all houses as well as all flats???