

Appendix 1: Consultation on the Renewal of the Additional HMO Licensing Scheme

1. Purpose of the consultation

The purpose of the consultation was to seek views on the Council's proposal to renew the Additional HMO Licensing Scheme across Oxford. The consultation invited feedback on the effectiveness of the current scheme, the potential impact of discontinuing it, the proposal to renew the scheme, and specific elements including licence lengths, criteria, fees, and administrative arrangements.

The consultation formed part of the Council's decision-making process and was undertaken to inform Cabinet's consideration of whether to designate a renewed scheme.

2. Consultation methodology

The consultation was carried out through a combination of:

- an online public consultation hosted on the Council's consultation platform
- two in person engagement sessions, which included facilitated discussion and a SWOT style exercise

The online consultation ran from 11 November 2025 to 1 February 2026 and was promoted via the Council's website and established stakeholder channels.

3. Consultation responses

A total of 80 consultation responses were received. Respondents included private landlords, letting and managing agents, residents, and organisations with an interest in the private rented sector. In addition to the online responses, written representations were received during the consultation period, and qualitative feedback was gathered at the in-person engagement sessions.

4. Profile of respondents

Of those responding to the online consultation:

- approximately 63% identified as private landlords operating in Oxford
- around 9% identified as letting or managing agents
- approximately 20% identified as residents living in Oxford
- a small number identified as representing organisations or other interests

Where respondents provided information about property portfolios, the majority indicated ownership or management of between one and five properties, with a similar proportion reporting between one and five HMOs.

Demographic questions were optional and had a lower response rate. The information provided is therefore indicative and not representative of the wider population.

5. Summary of consultation themes

5.1 Effectiveness of the current Additional Licensing Scheme

Views on the effectiveness of the current scheme were mixed. Approximately 46% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the scheme has been effective in improving the quality and management of HMOs in Oxford, while around 23% disagreed or strongly disagreed. A proportion of respondents indicated uncertainty or selected “don’t know”.

Supportive comments referred to improved standards, greater accountability, and clearer expectations for landlords. Critical comments focused on perceived duplication with existing enforcement powers and the view that compliant landlords are disproportionately affected.

5.2 Impact of discontinuing the scheme

When asked about the likely impact if the scheme were to end and not be continued, a greater proportion of respondents anticipated a negative or very negative impact than a positive one. Around 54% anticipated a negative or very negative impact, compared with approximately 21% who anticipated a positive or very positive impact.

Comments highlighted concerns that discontinuation could lead to a reduction in oversight of property standards and management practices. Others considered that existing enforcement powers would be sufficient without the need for licensing.

5.3 Views on renewal of the scheme

Overall views on the proposal to renew the Additional HMO Licensing Scheme were divided. Approximately 52% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with renewal, while around 34% disagreed or strongly disagreed. A smaller proportion neither agreed nor disagreed or were unsure.

Those supporting renewal generally cited improved housing standards, tenant protection, and consistency across the city. Those opposing renewal raised concerns about cost, administrative burden, and the effectiveness of licensing as a regulatory tool.

5.4 Licence lengths and criteria

Respondents expressed a range of views on the proposed licence lengths and criteria. Around 56% agreed or strongly agreed with the proposals, while approximately 32% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Supportive responses welcomed longer licence periods for accredited landlords as an incentive for good practice. Concerns raised included:

- fairness if accreditation is not maintained for the full licence term
- whether licence length could be reduced in such circumstances
- whether any refund would apply if a licence were varied

The Council notes these views. Licence lengths are awarded based on the criteria met at the point of grant, and licences may be varied where those criteria are no longer satisfied. Licence fees are charged on a cost recovery basis and are not refundable where a licence is lawfully granted and subsequently varied.

5.5 Licence fees

Views on licence fees were mixed. Approximately 47% of respondents considered the proposed fees to be too high, while around 37% considered them to be about right. A smaller proportion considered fees to be too low or were unsure.

Comments focused on affordability for smaller landlords, cumulative regulatory costs, and the perceived relationship between fees and enforcement activity. The Council notes these views and confirms that fees are set in accordance with cost recovery principles.

5.6 Administration, flexibility, and fairness

A number of respondents raised practical issues relating to scheme administration, including:

- common representation arrangements on licences
- refunds where licences are revoked or varied part way through their term

These matters relate to operational delivery rather than the principle of scheme renewal. Existing policies and guidance will continue to apply, and opportunities to clarify guidance and communications will be considered as part of implementation. Similar concerns about fairness and proportionality were also raised during the in person engagement sessions, particularly where issues were perceived to be outside a landlord's direct control.

5.7 Data protection and transparency

Some respondents expressed concerns about the publication of landlord details on the public licence register, particularly in relation to names and addresses.

The Council notes these concerns and confirms that the public register operates in accordance with statutory requirements. Only information required by law is made publicly available, and data protection obligations have been considered and complied with.

5.8 In person engagement sessions

Two in person engagement sessions were held during the consultation period, involving landlords, managing agents, and other stakeholders. Participants took part in facilitated discussion and a SWOT style exercise to explore views on the current scheme and the proposal for renewal.

Strengths

Participants identified a number of strengths associated with the current Additional Licensing Scheme, including:

- improved quality of accommodation and management standards for tenants
- clearer expectations placed on landlords and agents
- support from the Council in driving compliance
- a more level playing field for compliant landlords
- reduced overcrowding and better control of tenant numbers

Some participants noted that licensing helps agents encourage landlords to address issues that might otherwise be delayed or avoided.

Weaknesses

Weaknesses raised focused primarily on cost and administration, including:

- licence fees and the cumulative cost of regulation
- the administrative burden associated with applications and renewals
- perceptions that compliant landlords bear a disproportionate burden
- concerns about fairness where enforcement action relates to issues outside a landlord's direct control

There were also comments about inconsistency in how requirements are understood or applied.

Opportunities

Participants identified opportunities to improve the operation of the scheme, including:

- clearer guidance and communication from the Council
- more practical advice and support for landlords and agents
- improved alignment with other regulatory requirements
- greater use of data to target non compliant or higher risk properties

Some participants suggested that improved communication could help increase understanding of the scheme's purpose.

Threats

Threats identified included:

- the risk of landlords disengaging from the sector
- potential reduction in the supply of privately rented accommodation
- landlords choosing to operate outside regulatory frameworks
- wider pressures on the private rented sector impacting compliance

Participants also noted that removal of the scheme could reduce oversight of property standards and management practices.

Overall, the themes raised during the in person sessions broadly aligned with those received through the online consultation.

6. Use of consultation responses

All consultation responses have been considered in the development of the final proposals set out in the main report. The consultation has informed refinements to guidance and implementation considerations but has not altered the Council's assessment that renewal of the Additional HMO Licensing Scheme is justified.