



Matthew Pennycook MP
Minister of State for Housing and Planning
2 Marsham Street, London
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Cllr Joanne Sexton
Spelthorne Borough Council
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29 January 2026

Re: Support required to address workforce challenges in Licensing and Inspection of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

Dear Minister,

I am writing in my capacity as Leader of Spelthorne Borough Council to raise concerns regarding the growing workforce pressures affecting our ability to meet statutory duties relating to the identification, licensing, regulation, and inspection of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).

This Council recognises that HMOs play an important role in meeting housing demand, particularly for lower-income households, and we are fully committed to ensuring that any such properties in our borough are safe and well-managed. However, our capacity to maintain robust regulatory oversight of HMOs has become increasingly constrained by significant challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified professional officers, particularly within environmental health and housing regulation. Local authorities across the country are competing for a limited supply of specialists, many of whom require extensive qualifications, technical expertise, and practical experience. This shortage is widening the gap between the statutory duties placed upon councils and the workforce available to undertake them.

We are already reliant on interim and agency staff to plug resourcing gaps in our environmental health residential team, increasing costs and affecting capacity. This situation is likely to worsen due to Local Government Reorganisation in Surrey, where we are already seeing evidence that the instability this has created for council employees is exacerbating difficulties in recruiting and retaining key personnel.

Alongside these staffing pressures, demand for licensing and enforcement activity continues to grow, driven by an expanding HMO sector. As a borough bordering London, Spelthorne is facing increasing pressures due to landlords acquiring properties in our area to house tenants, many of whom are placed by London Boroughs. This is causing particular concern for local residents due to the disruption and anti-social behaviour associated with some of these HMOs.



We welcome the Government's plans to strengthen enforcement powers for local authorities in the Renters' Rights Act 2025. However, without adequate professional resources, councils face unavoidable delays in licensing processing times, inspection schedules, and enforcement actions, creating risks for tenants, communities, and responsible landlords alike. The completion of the transition into a West Surrey unitary authority from April 2027 is unlikely to resolve the resourcing pressures facing our area, as other councils in Surrey have similar challenges recruiting professional environmental health and housing regulation staff.

Given the national nature of these challenges, I would welcome the Government's support in the following areas:

1. Development of a national workforce strategy to strengthen the pipeline of environmental health and housing regulation professionals, including investment in relevant qualifications, apprenticeships, and structured career pathways.
2. Exploration of national recruitment or incentive initiatives to support local authorities in attracting and retaining suitably qualified staff.
3. A review of funding arrangements for local authority regulatory services so that they accurately reflect the true cost of delivering HMO licensing and enforcement functions.

We recognise and value the Government's commitment to improving housing standards across the private rented sector. However, achieving these aims depends on a professional workforce that is sufficiently resourced, trained, and supported to undertake the regulatory work required.

Addressing the current constraints would make a significant contribution to strengthening national housing regulation, protecting vulnerable tenants and shielding our communities from the effects of poorly managed HMOs.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you or your officials to discuss our experiences in Spelthorne and to explore potential solutions in more detail.

Thank you for giving this important issue your consideration and I look forward to your response.

I look forward to hearing from you as a matter of urgency.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Joanne Sexton
Leader of Spelthorne Borough Council