



**WATFORD  
BOROUGH  
COUNCIL**

## **Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)**

### **Amenity & Space Guidance to Landlords**

## Foreword

This document has been produced to provide owners, managers, letting agents and contractors with the necessary information to help them provide their tenants with safe and high quality accommodation without the need for intervention by the Local Authority.

The Government believes that safe and properly managed Houses in Multiple Occupation fulfil an important function in the private rented housing market. HMOs have a particular role in providing affordable accommodation in areas of high housing demand where other rents may be high.

We aim to encourage the supply of good quality private rented homes, provide and facilitate information and training for landlords.

## Definitions and categories of properties

<b>House in Multiple Occupation</b>	A <b>house</b> , which is occupied by people who do not form a single <b>household</b> and share basic amenities such as bathroom, toilet and kitchen facilities. This includes groups of friends and students
<b>House</b>	'House' is not conclusively defined in legislation but includes flats, blocks of flats and the grounds, outbuildings and boundaries.
<b>Household</b>	Each of these is a single household <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• a single person;</li><li>• co-habiting couples whether or not of the opposite sex;</li><li>• families of related people.</li></ul>
<b>Licensable HMO</b>	An HMO that is <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• occupied by 5 or more people, <b>and</b></li><li>• occupied by people as their only or main home.</li></ul> This includes students who only occupy a property in term time.

You can find more information about whether your HMO needs a licence on our website at [www.watford.gov.uk/HMOlicensing](http://www.watford.gov.uk/HMOlicensing). If you are still unsure, you can contact Environmental Health on 01923 226400 or [envhealth@watford.gov.uk](mailto:envhealth@watford.gov.uk).

## Contents

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Purpose of the guide</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Using this document</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>General information</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Space and overcrowding</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Occupancy</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Minimum room sizes</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Dormitory accommodation</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Facilities and Amenities</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Washing and sanitary facilities</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Kitchen facilities</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Ventilation</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Heating</b>	<b>11</b>

## **Purpose of this guide**

There are some legal requirements in relation to amenity provision in licensed Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO). These include a minimum level of amenities such as WC's, bathrooms and cooking facilities. Also, in order to license a property the Council must be satisfied that it is suitable for occupation by a certain number of people. A factor in this is the size of rooms and this guide includes the minimum room sizes that this Council will normally expect.

It is this Council's opinion that in the majority of circumstances these standards will apply to other HMO's (i.e. non-licensable properties) in the same way.

Therefore, whilst much of this document is guidance, it is acknowledged that the requirements in individual properties may differ dependent on the risks presented. This document provides you with the anticipated standards. If you have any questions you should contact Environmental Health on 01923 226400 or [envhealth@watford.gov.uk](mailto:envhealth@watford.gov.uk).

## **Background**

Amenity provision, crowding and space are all considered when assessing hazards in HMOs under the **Housing Health and Safety Rating Scheme (HHSRS)**.

HHSRS has replaced the *fitness standard* and was brought in under the Housing Act 2004. It requires a risk assessment approach to surveying properties and the Local Authority can require measures, whether they are improvements or repairs, to be put in place. 29 hazards are considered and these include crowding and space, food safety and personal hygiene. This document outlines standards that if followed are likely to reduce any risks presented by these three hazards to an acceptable level, meaning that the Local Authority are unlikely to take any formal action. Other options for reducing the risks may be acceptable and you should contact Environmental Services to discuss alternatives.

Room sizes have been determined using minimum standards set in legislation, guidance from the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and consideration of how to minimize the risk of ill health or accident through crowding, lack of space or unsafe layout.

This document does not deal with fire safety in HMOs, a separate document – Guide to Fire Precautions in HMOs – is available to download on the Council's website at [www.watford.gov.uk/HMO](http://www.watford.gov.uk/HMO).

## **Using this document:**

If you have a licensable HMO legal requirements that will be included in your licence are contained within a box.

Legal requirements for licensable HMOs
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For HMOs that are not licensable the legal requirements are recommended as suitable measures to control the hazards previously mentioned. Room sizes whilst not set out in legislation will be used as a standard to assess suitability for occupation unless the property allows other factors to be taken into account.

All other information provided is guidance aimed at reducing risks to an acceptable level and applies to all HMOs.

## **Other Information**

### **Planning Permission?**

Please note that in certain circumstance planning permission may be required, in particular if you are considering major extensions, conversions or a change of use from a single family home. You should contact Development Control on 01923 226400 for further information before completing works.

### **Building Regulation approval?**

Structural alterations, installations of additional drainage and associated sinks and showers etc may be require approval. You should contact Building Control on 01923 226400 for more information or look on the web site [www.watford.gov.uk](http://www.watford.gov.uk).

### **Technical Advice**

If you require further advice after reading this guide, our experienced team provide a range of paid and free services. To find out more about these services visit [www.watford.gov.uk/HMOservices](http://www.watford.gov.uk/HMOservices).

## **Space and Overcrowding**

### **Occupancy**

A child under the age of 1 is not counted in determining occupancy. However, all children over the age of 1 shall be counted as an adult.

People over the age of 10 and of the opposite sex should not sleep in the same room unless living together as partners.

**With the exception of dormitory accommodation no more than two persons shall occupy an individual room.**

### **Minimum room sizes**

#### **One person units of accommodation**

- 11m<sup>2</sup> including cooking facilities
- 8m<sup>2</sup> where provided with separate individual or shared kitchen

#### **Two person units of accommodation**

- 16m<sup>2</sup> including cooking facilities
- 13m<sup>2</sup> where provided with separate individual or shared kitchen

Room sizes can be reduced by a maximum of 1.49m<sup>2</sup> where risks are adequately controlled through provision of use of a communal area in addition to exclusive use of a letting. For example, a communal dining room, lounge, or dining kitchen.

### **Common Rooms**

#### **Kitchens**

- Use by up to 2 persons - 5m<sup>2</sup>
- Use by up to 3 persons - 6m<sup>2</sup>
- Use by up to 4 persons - 7m<sup>2</sup>
- Use by up to 5 persons - 9m<sup>2</sup>
- Use by up to 6 persons - 10m<sup>2</sup>

#### **Dining Kitchens**

- Use by 1 – 3 persons - 8.5m<sup>2</sup>
- Use by 4 – 6 persons - 11.5m<sup>2</sup>

#### **Living and Dining Rooms**

- Use by 1 – 3 persons - 8.5m<sup>2</sup>
- Use by 4 – 6 persons - 11m<sup>2</sup>

Please note that regardless of the room size the layout and ergonomics must be satisfactory and safe. This means considering location of cookers away from exit routes or fire risks and ensuring that there is sufficient space to carry out tasks safely and without risk.

## **Dormitory Accommodation**

'Dormitory Accommodation' means a room or rooms that is/are used by 2 or more people that are NOT living as cohabittees.

Dormitory accommodation includes night shelters and premises where people resort only at night. You should contact Watford Borough Council, Environmental Services if you intend to provide dormitory accommodation.

### **(i) Sleeping Areas**

In each room:           1 person 8 m<sup>2</sup>  
                                  and for each additional person, a further 6.5m<sup>2</sup>,  
                                  exclusive of any area devoted to storage.

This standard shall not be relaxed where bunk beds are in use. Bunk beds shall not be used where the floor to ceiling height does not exceed 3.00m.

**Sleeping accommodation for men and for women shall be separate.**

### **(ii) Common Rooms**

*Common room(s) must be provided.* For rooms serving up to 6 persons sharing, the minimum size should be in accordance with the standards for living rooms and dining rooms set out above on page 6 under 'common rooms'. For rooms serving more than 6 people, the minimum room size will be 11m<sup>2</sup> with an additional 1m<sup>2</sup> per person for every additional person residing at the property.

### **(iii) Cooking Facilities**

Cooking facilities within dormitory accommodation will not be permitted. Facilities provided will have to meet the requirements set out for kitchens below. An exception to this is where food is provided and access to the kitchen is limited, for example night shelters. In this case food provision will be assessed under the requirements of food safety legislation. You must however ensure that occupants have access to drinking water at all times.

## Facilities and Amenities

### Provision of washing and sanitary facilities

<b>Minimum Facilities</b>	<b>No. persons suitable for:</b>
Bathroom with WC wash hand basin and bath/shower	4
Bathroom with wash hand basin and bath/shower 1 WC separate from bathroom	5
2 Bathrooms with wash hand basins bath and shower 2 WCs which can be located in the bathrooms	6-8
2 bathrooms with wash hand basins and bath/shower 2 WCs separate from the bathrooms or 1 WC in bathroom and 1 WC separate.	9
2 Bathrooms with wash hand basins and bath/shower. 2 WCs separate from bathrooms	10
1 separate WC for every 5 occupiers and 1 bathroom with wash hand basins and bath/shower for every 5 occupiers	11+

### **Wash hand Basins**

Where there are 5 or more occupants every unit of accommodation shall include a wash hand basin.

The above requirement is set out in Legislation, however, Watford Borough Council has made a decision to only enforce this requirement where a risk assessment of the property demonstrates the need. This decision is based on experience from the Registration Scheme and surveying of landlords and tenants.

**Watford Borough Council will expect there to be a minimum ratio of 1 wash hand basin for every 2 occupiers.**

- In calculating the ratio, no account shall be taken of wash hand basins that are not full size or located where there is insufficient space to wash and change.
- Minimum size for wash hand basin to be included in the above calculation is 550mm x 400mm
- Wash hand basin – 300mm two course tiled splash back shall be provided to all basins.



All bath, showers and wash hand basins must be provided with a constant supply of hot and cold water.

- Bath - minimum dimensions 1700mm x 760mm, to be located in a bathroom.
- Shower - minimum dimensions 800mm x 800mm in a room with adequate drying and changing space.

A two-course tile splash back shall be provided to the bath.

All bathrooms must be suitably located, be of sufficient size and layout and be adequately heated and ventilated.

- The walls and floor of any WC or bathroom shall be reasonably smooth, non-absorbent and capable of being readily cleansed.
- All WCs or bath/shower rooms shall be ventilated directly to the external air either by a window (open able area at least 1/20<sup>th</sup> of floor area of the room) or ideally by suitably sized mechanical ventilation providing a minimum of 3 air changes per hour, operated from the lighting circuit of the room and fitted with a 20 minute overrun.

### **Kitchen Facilities**

Shared kitchen facilities must be suitably located and be of a sufficient layout and size, and be supplied with sufficient quantity of:

Sink with draining board  
Adequate supply of cold and constant hot water to the sink  
Installation or equipment to cook food  
Electrical sockets  
Worktops for the preparation of food  
Cupboards for the storage of food and utensils  
Fridge and freezer  
Appropriate refuse disposal  
Extractor fans, fire blankets and fire doors.

A set of kitchen facilities is adequate for 5 persons, if a multifunctional microwave is provided in addition; it will suffice for 6 persons.

Each occupant should have constant access to a kitchen. In no case shall the kitchen facilities be more than two floors distant from any user. Please refer to the size requirements on page 6 of this document.

**A set of kitchen facilities within a communal kitchen should include:**

- **Cooking:** A gas or electric cooker with a minimum of four burners/hobs, an oven and a grill.

NOTE: COOKERS SHOULD BE LOCATED IN A SAFE POSITION AWAY FROM DOORS AND WITH ADJACENT WORK SPACE.

- **Storage:** Each household should have a storage cupboard consisting of either a single base unit or a double wall unit. The space in a sink unit is not acceptable. It is recommended that cupboards are lockable.
- **Preparation:** A worktop/table of smooth and impervious material of at least 600mm x 1500mm. This is in addition to any worktop housing a sink unit or hob. At least two twin ... sockets above worktop level should be provided, in addition to electrical sockets serving the cooker, washing machine and fridge etc.
- **Sink:** A metal or ceramic sink and drainer minimum dimension 500mm x 600mm on a stable base with adequate cold and constant hot water.
- **Fridge & freezer:** Ideally each occupant should have their own fridge but as a minimum they should have 0.05m<sup>3</sup> of fridge space per household. Where a freezer is not provided, additional fridge space must be provided.

**Exclusive Kitchen Facilities**

Where kitchen facilities are provided for exclusive use in a unit of accommodation they must be provided with;

Adequate appliances for the cooking of food  
A sink with adequate supply of cold and constant hot water  
A worktop for the preparation of food  
Sufficient electrical sockets  
A storage cupboard  
A fridge

**Kitchen facilities for exclusive use in one unit of accommodation should include:**

- **Cooking:** A gas/electric cooker with a minimum of 2 burners/hobs in addition to a grill and oven.

NOTE: COOKERS SHOULD BE LOCATED IN A SAFE POSITION AWAY FROM DOORS AND WITH ADJACENT WORK SPACE.

- **Storage:** A single base unit or a double wall unit. The space under a sink unit is not acceptable for the storage of food.

- **Preparation:** A worktop of smooth and impervious material of at least 600mm x 1000mm for a single person unit and 600mm x 1500mm for a 2 person unit of accommodation. At least two twin power sockets above worktops shall be provided in addition to any other electrical sockets serving the cooker, washing machine and fridge etc.
- **Sink:** A metal or ceramic sink and drainer, minimum dimensions 500mm x 600mm on a stable base with adequate cold and constant hot water.
- **Fridge:** A minimum of fridge space is 0.05m<sup>3</sup>, however where a freezer is not provided this should be increased.

## **Ventilation**

All kitchens shall be ventilated directly to external air, either by a window, which has an open area of at least 1/20<sup>th</sup> of the floor area of that room or ideally suitably sited mechanical extraction. Due to risk of entry by intruders it is generally not acceptable for the only form of ventilation in a ground floor room to be a window. Extraction should provide at least one air change an hour.

## **Heating**

Each unit of accommodation must have adequate means of space heating.

Heating provision must be safe, controllable by the individual and affordable.

### **Acceptable means of heating**

- Gas fired central heating: This should operate on a timer and thermostat
- Fixed gas room heaters: These must comply with the Gas safety regulations
- Off peak electric storage heaters: These should have an off peak tariff and occupants must be given instructions for use.

### **Unacceptable means of heating**

- Open fires
- Portable LPG heaters
- On peak electric heaters (unless the building has very low heat loss)

The target temperature is 21°C for the bed-sit and sitting rooms, for other areas it is 18°C. Excess cold is a hazard assessed under the new Housing Health and Safety Rating Scheme. The Council will be assessing the heating provisions and thermal performance of HMOs. It is therefore strongly recommended that you improve insulation to reduce heat loss.

Please note that Building Regulation approval is now required for works including replacement windows, doors, boilers and other external works.