

**South Ribble Borough Council**  
**Housing of Multiple Occupation and**  
**Children's Homes Policy and**  
**Action Plan**  
January 2026

## Key Questions

### Why does South Ribble Council need to take action?

HMOs, where they are well managed and maintained, can play a role in helping the borough to meet its housing need. However, the maintenance of these properties can be poor and the increasing number across the borough is causing concern among residents and councillors about their safety and the impact on local communities.

South Ribble Council have seen an increase in the number of children's homes being set up within the Borough South Ribble. In the majority of cases these homes are well managed and are needed to house our most vulnerable children. However, there are some providers who are purchasing homes in South Ribble and accommodating very vulnerable children with very little support which are having a disproportionate impact on communities.

### Is this issue unique to South Ribble?

No. A lot of neighbouring areas have experienced similar issues and have taken similar steps to better control HMOs and children's homes. For example, Preston City Council recently presented their work on introducing an Article 4 direction to the Joint Advisory Committee for the Local Plan.

### What would introducing and Article 4 direction do?

The introduction of an Article 4 Direction will simply restrict the ability for these uses to be implemented through permitted development rights and require planning permission to be sought. Larger HMOs for 7 or more people already require planning permission in all instances.

### So what can be done?

In addition the Article 4, the council will resource more extensive proactive inspections and, where appropriate, enforcement of HMOs and children's homes against the existing amenity and space standards. In addition, those standards will be reviewed to ensure they provide the strongest framework to drive high standards in HMOs and children's homes.

## Section 1: Defining Houses in Multiple Occupation

### 1.1 What will this Action Plan do?

The Action Plan seeks to clearly set out:

- The definition of a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) and Children's Homes.
- Why is there a need for South Ribble Borough Council to review private sector HMO infrastructure?
- What legal powers will South Ribble Borough Council utilise.

- Our priorities for improving HMOs and Children's Homes and when and how we shall do this.

Our aims in undertaking and working to this Action plan are to:

- Improve the quality of HMO and Children's Homes in the borough.
- Remove or reduce to an acceptable level, hazards in HMOs and Children's Homes to protect occupants.
- Prevent HMOs and Children's Homes from having a detrimental impact on local communities.

## 1.2 What is a House in Multiple Occupation?

Under section 254 of the Housing Act 2004 a new definition of HMOs was introduced. A building is classified as a HMO if it meets any one of the following tests:

### a) The standard test

Any building or part of a building in which two or more households live and share basic amenities such as cooking and bathing facilities.

### b) The self-contained flat test

Any flat where two or more households live and share one or more basic amenities such as cooking or bathing facilities (shared flats).

### c) The converted building test

Any building which has been converted into living accommodation and is shared by persons who do not form a single household. For example - a building which was previously used as a corner shop but has been converted for use as a shared house.

### d) Certain converted blocks of flats

Any building that has been converted into self-contained flats either before 1991 or the conversion works do not comply with the 1991 Building Regulations and more than one third of the flats are occupied on short tenancies. An example of a section 257 HMO is a four-storey townhouse converted, before 1991, into four self-contained flats.

## 1.3 What is a Children's Home?

Under the Care Standards Act 2000, an establishment is defined as a *children's home* if it provides care and accommodation wholly or mainly for children.

- Children are persons under the age of 18.
- Young people aged 18 or over may live there, but they must be in the minority.

## 1.4 HMO's in South Ribble

There is evidence there is a growing number of HMOs in South Ribble. The majority of these are small, shared houses but there are some larger HMOs of three or more storeys.

Some of the larger HMOs are required to be licensed with South Ribble Borough Council under Part 2 of the Housing Act 2004. HMOs of three or more storeys with 5 or more occupants who do not form a single household and have to share a bathroom, wc, or kitchen must be licensed. Anecdotal information suggests that South Ribble may have some unknown licensable HMOs and as such the council has a statutory responsibility to licence these properties.

The council is aware of a growing number of smaller HMOs located in South Ribble, which do not need to be licensed.

The council has produced a guidance document [SRBC Amenity Standard V3 2024](#) on the standards it is seeking for HMOs in South Ribble called the Amenity Standards. The guide is intended to assist owners, agents, and occupiers in understanding the standards they should expect in such accommodation.

It encompasses both licensable and non-licensable HMOs and covers topics such as minimum bedroom sizes, kitchen and bathroom facilities, heating and ventilation, fire safety, waste management and electrical safety. The standards also refer the reader to types of antisocial behaviour and states that where ASB is reported and investigated, a licence can be revoked. It is available on the Council's web site.

## 1.5 Why is there a need for South Ribble Borough Council to review private sector HMO and Children's homes infrastructure?

HMOs often provide accommodation to people who cannot secure mainstream privately rented accommodation or social housing. For example, single people on low incomes can find it difficult to afford to rent an entire house or flat so find it easier and cheaper to rent a room or bedsit in a HMO. South Ribble is also seeing increasing number of supported accommodations being provided in HMOs specifically to support vulnerable people. The Housing Options team have set up a supported accommodation forum, and all providers of this type of accommodation have been engaging with the team.

HMOs where they are well managed and maintained, do play a role in helping the borough to meet its housing need. The biggest single type of housing needed for people with a connection to the borough is for single person accommodation. Locations within towns are considered to be appropriate with access to facilities, shops, employment opportunities and transport.

However, HMOs are not without their problems – the maintenance of these properties can be inconsistent and there are justified concerns from both residents, councillors and officers with regards to property and management standards and community cohesion issues.

Temporary households tend not to make a long-term investment in their local neighbourhood, and this may have a detrimental impact on the visual appearance of a neighbourhood. Such areas may also experience excessive demands on local services, eg, refuse collection, and as a consequence this can place severe strains on infrastructure.

There is a national shortage of Children's homes, however because homes in Lancashire are cheaper in comparison to other areas of the country, there are a disproportionately high number of homes being purchased in Lancashire including within South Ribble. There is a growing body of evidence that extremely vulnerable children from across the Country are being placed in Children's Homes in Lancashire. The Community Safety and Environmental Health teams have increasingly been called to investigate cases of noise and anti-social behaviour from some of these homes.

## 1.6 Legal Powers

The Government and council's housing objective is to ensure that everyone has the opportunity of a decent home and to promote social cohesion, well-being and self-dependence.

South Ribble Borough Council has been given statutory duties to licence certain high-risk HMOs and deal with all serious (Category 1) hazards as assessed in accordance with the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). The council also has various other powers contained in the Housing Act 2004 and in various regulations that enable us to manage HMOs and Childrens homes well:

### **The Housing Act 2004**

Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004 introduced the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) which provides local authorities with a toolkit to both assess health and safety hazards in residential accommodation including Children's homes and then take appropriate and proportionate enforcement action to remove or reduce those hazards to an acceptable level.

### **Mandatory HMO Licensing**

As mentioned previously, Part 2 of the Housing Act 2004 introduced new statutory provision to licence 'high risk' HMOs consisting of three storeys with five or more occupants in order to ensure that fire safety, amenities, overcrowding, general repair, management standards, gas and electric safety and furniture safety are all to acceptable levels. Local authorities are required to identify HMOs subject to mandatory licensing which have not yet been licensed and encourage landlords to obtain a licence. If landlords refuse to licence a HMO, the local authority may seek to prosecute the landlord. Upon summary conviction, the person who ought to licence the property would be liable for a fine of up to £20,000.

### **Management Regulations**

All HMOs in South Ribble are subject to 'Management Regulations'. The two types of 'Management Regulations' applicable are:

The Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation (England) Regulations 2006; and

The Licensing and Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation (Additional Provisions) (England) Regulations 2007.

The 2006 Regulations covers all HMOs, whilst the 2007 Regulations apply specifically to Section 257 HMOs (buildings converted into self-contained flats, which do not comply with Building Standard Regulations 1991).

Both Regulations place responsibilities on managers of HMOs regarding the maintenance and management of HMOs. A failure to comply with such regulations is punishable by prosecution.

### **Planning Permission/Permitted development and Article 4 directions**

When an existing residential property is converted into a HMO accommodating fewer than 6 residents planning permission is not normally required as this is deemed to be permitted development.

If a residential property is proposed to change use to a HMO to accommodate more than 6 people then planning permission is required. To convert a non-residential property into a HMO planning permission is required in all instances.

When planning permission is required, the policies in the South Ribble Local Plan and the Central Lancashire Core Strategy are taken into account when considering planning applications. Also of relevance is the draft Central Lancashire Local Plan.

There is a route open to councils to apply to the Secretary of State to remove the permitted development rights, known as an Article 4 direction. Paragraph 54 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) advises that the use of Article 4 Directions to remove permitted development right(s) should be limited to situations where an Article 4 Direction is necessary to protect local amenity or the wellbeing of the area and must be based on robust evidence and apply to the smallest geographical area possible. National Planning Practice Guidance also notes that blanket Article 4 Directions covering large areas (for example, the whole of a town) are not encouraged unless there is convincing evidence to justify such a direction.

The creation of an Article 4 Direction is subject to public consultation and the Local Planning Authority has to notify the Secretary of State before the Directive is introduced. Whilst the Secretary of State is not required to approve it, they can revoke or amend it should they feel the evidence is not sufficient to support a direction.

There are two types of Article 4 Direction under the GPDO: Direction with immediate effect; and non-immediate Directions. An immediate direction can withdraw permitted development rights straight away, however, in accordance with Section 107 and 108 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1992 and The Town & Country Planning (Compensation) (England) Regulation 2015 (as amended), compensation provisions apply to directions with immediate effect, whereas non-immediate directions may be served, giving 12 months' notice of the intent to enforce a direction, without the need to grant any subsequent compensation. Most Article 4 Directions are introduced as non-immediate directions to avoid issues of compensation.

Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) that benefit from permitted development rights are properties rented out to a maximum of 6 people who are not from one household but share facilities like a bathroom and kitchen. Most HMOs of this scale are conversions or sub-divisions of existing residential properties. The introduction of an Article 4 Direction will simply restrict the ability for these uses to be implemented through permitted development rights and require planning permission to be sought. Larger HMOs for 7 or more people require planning permission in all instances.

In order to introduce an Article 4 Direction, the council must be able to provide a robust justification for doing so. This evidence could include the imbalance in the local housing market, levels of deprivation in the area, crime and anti-social behaviour by residents of HMOs, recorded problems with car parking and impacts on residential amenity. However, this evidence must be robust and show demonstrable detrimental impacts of HMOs on the area in question.

An Article 4 Direction in isolation will not necessarily be a solution to these issues that HMOs can cause. Current and emerging Local Plan policies remain supportive of such uses. HMOs do provide an important source of low-cost housing and play an important role in the borough providing a balanced mix of housing. That makes the actions within this plan important; to ensure that there is a clear position that the council requires high quality accommodation that has a positive impact on local communities.

### 1.7 What are we currently doing?

The Community Safety & Environmental Health Team has successfully... Inspected and licensed all of the current known licensable HMOs in the borough.

We have always been committed to ensuring that all Licensed HMOs in South Ribble are safe and suitable for occupation. We shall maintain this commitment as we work towards the revised priorities contained in this Action plan.

The Community Safety & Environmental Health Team has revised or renewed... All of the HMO licensing documentation including application form, HMO standards, fee recovery mechanism and pages on the South Ribble Borough Council website in readiness for the new ways of working through this Action plan. All of this has been done in line with RIAMS (Regulatory Information and Management System) utilised by South Ribble Borough Council.

Within the Council's Community Safety and Environmental Health team we have experienced Environmental Health Officers, Technical officers and Community Safety Officers who have responsibility for ensuring that our HMOs and children's homes are safe and suitable for occupation and any ASB is addressed. The work of the team has historically dealt with HMOs in various ways but mainly in a responsive manner, dealing with complaints and referrals as and when they have been notified of such.

### 1.8 Benefits of improving HMOs

The Planning & Environmental Health teams are... Mapping licensable HMOs and Children's Homes and those coming through the planning system to understand the

*potential for proliferations and concentration of HMOs and Children's Homes within South Ribble borough.*

The preparation of this Action Plan has enabled us to review our existing priorities and establish new priorities to effectively tackle Houses in Multiple Occupation and Children's Homes to greater affect. As a result, we are focussing our resources on a shift away from merely responding to complaints/referrals surrounding HMOs and Children's Homes to proactively and strategically working to identify all HMOs and Children's Homes in the borough and licence any licensable HMOs that have so far evaded the attention of the local authority. We shall also work towards delivering the following objectives:

### **Improve neighbourhoods**

- Ensure that HMOs and Children's Homes are well managed and well maintained, so are not detrimental to the local community.
- Ensure that landlords play a role in regulating tenant conduct, therefore reducing anti-social behaviour.
- Provide safer and quality accommodation for local residents who wish to access it.

### **Increase opportunities for people in housing need**

- Improve housing standards, thus helping the private rented sector become a tenure of choice.

### **Help the owners of HMOs and Children's Homes**

- Provide information and advice on their legal responsibilities in relation to managing and maintaining HMOs and Children's Homes.

### **Benefit the local economy and wider community**

- Reduce demand on partner agencies and services such as Lancashire Fire & Rescue Service and South Ribble Council's Housing Options service.
- Reduces demand for building new homes and help protect the environment.

In meeting these objectives, the Community Safety & Environmental Health teams will continue to work closely with all council teams as well as with external agencies such as Lancashire Police, Lancashire County Council and the NHS. In line with the working protocol in place we shall further maintain our work with the Lancashire Fire & Rescue Service and continue to carry out joint inspections of larger, higher risk HMOs as and when required.

## **Section 2: Our Priorities**

### **2.1 Priorities for improving HMOs and Children's homes.**

The HMO and Children's Home Action Plan has been developed with the following four main priorities:

1. Improve conditions within HMOs and children's homes and prevent them having a damaging effect on local communities.
2. Issue licenses for all licensable HMOs in the borough.
3. Improve information and advice.

To help us deliver our aims and the objectives detailed previously we have developed a clear Action plan (in Section 3) detailing a number of actions, who will deliver them, what the key milestones are and what the intended outcome of the action is.

The delivery shows a road map to reflect South Ribble's continuing aims and objectives within its given resources.

## **2.2 Fairness, Equality and Diversity**

Full consideration has been given to the potential impacts that this Action Plan may have upon those in the Borough that may in some way be disadvantaged by the Council's proposals.

As a result, it has been determined that the impact of this Action Plan on any such persons is exceedingly low as the aims of the plan are to actively and fairly work to improve conditions in HMOs and children's homes in all communities in South Ribble.

## **2.3 Monitoring and Performance**

We recognise the importance of ensuring that we manage and monitor our performance in relation to our targets. The HMO and Children's Homes Action Plan will be monitored by the Director of Communities and Leisure, Head of Public Protection and Environmental Health and the Manager of Environmental Health team.

## **2.4 Resourcing the Delivery Plan**

### HMO and Children home identification

Various teams in South Ribble Council such as Housing, Revenue and Benefits team will ensure that all council data is utilised to provide a list of all unknown HMOs and children homes currently operating in South Ribble.

### Private rented Landlords Forum

The Housing Options team will lead on setting up a private rented forum to provide information to the owners of the HMOs and Children's Homes and ensuring that they are aware of their legal responsibilities and increase engagement with the sector.

### Planning

The Planning Policy team will review available data and start the evidence gathering process before consultation to determine whether there is sufficient impact to warrant future control of HMOs in parts of the borough should evidence suggest that an

increased number of HMOs and Children’s Homes are leading to increased instances of crime and antisocial behaviour.

### Section 3: Action Plan

#### 3.1 Table detailing milestones and expected outcomes

Action	Lead Organisation	Milestone	Outcome
Review Council data to identify unlicensed HMOs and Children’s homes to ensure that they meet appropriate Housing Standards.	SMT (Senior Management team)	SMT uses exemption from data protection legislation, to identify all services that can help identify unlicensed HMOs and Children’s homes, such as building control, housing and Benefit teams	A list of Unlicensed HMOs and children’s homes will be identified and inspected to ensure that they meet minimum legal Housing Standards
Improve information to owners of HMOs and Children’s homes including expectations of a well ran HMO and children homes by reviewing web site.	Community Safety & Environmental Health	Owners of HMOs and children’s homes will be provided with information about housing standards they need to meet and their responsibility to reduce anti- social behaviour including unwanted noise.	Current and prospective owners of HMOs and children’s homes in South Ribble will be aware of what is expected.
We will seek to set up private rented Landlords forum to assist in engaging with private sector landlords.	Housing Options	The Forum will provide a mechanism for engaging with the owners of HMOs and Children’s Homes including private renters.	Current and prospective owners of HMOs and children’s homes in South Ribble will be aware of what is expected.
A program of inspecting previously unknown HMOs and Children’s Homes to be undertaken	Community Safety & Environmental Health	HMOs and Children’s Homes will be inspected and assessed against Housing Standards legislation.	HMOs and children’s homes will be risk rated and Inspected in accordance with this rating which will ensure that HMO accommodation is

			suitable and contributes to the housing need in South Ribble for single bed accommodation.
The addresses of unlicensed HMOs and Children's Homes will be shared with Community Safety Partners.	Community Safety & Environmental Health	The Police Analyst will review anti-social behaviour occurring in and around HMOs and children's homes.	The information will be used by the Community Safety Partnership to address any concerns identified, not only with the individuals concerned but the owners who retain some responsibility for inappropriate behaviour maximising the use of civil powers available.
Investigate the value of introducing additional licensing for HMOs.	Community Safety & Environmental Health	This will allow the Local Authority to require an increased number of HMOs to be licensed.	Additional licensing allows councils to regulate smaller HMOs (typically 3–4 occupants) that fall outside mandatory licensing. This helps:  Address <b>poor property conditions</b> , damp, and inadequate energy efficiency.  Enforce <b>fire safety measures</b> , proper waste storage, and compliance with health standards.  Reduce risks associated with overcrowding and rogue landlords.