

COVID-19 highlights the urgent need for Statutory Regulations on the Standard/Management/Maintenance of Rented Houses Of Multiple Occupancy(HMOs)

Covid-19 highlights the urgent need for statutory regulations on the Standard, Management and Maintenance of Rented HMOs. HMO (House of Multiple Occupancy) is a recognised term in the UK and Northern Ireland to designate a house rented to several unrelated adults, as opposed to a house rented to a family. In the UK and Northern Ireland, a landlord requires a licence from the local government in order to rent out a HMO. The landlord has to prove that the house is fit for the number of people renting it, follows the necessary safety codes, and that he/she is “fit and proper” to manage a house.

High Income Low Standards

In our area, in the midst of the pandemic we have students/adults renting shared bedrooms with one bathroom/washing facility between 5/8 adults. Many of these properties are substandard to bedsits, which were made illegal some years ago due to health and safety concerns. These rented HMOs are not fit for purpose but can generate €50,000 to €60,000 annually for a 5/8 bedroom property. These are financially generating businesses and should be treated as such.

The current legislation in this country on the management and upkeep of rented properties is minimal, outdated and in urgent need of change to make it relevant to 2021. No tenants should be left at the mercy of the personality of the landlord.

We are calling for:

1. Licensing of all landlords.
2. NCT type test for rented properties where there is certain criteria to be checked and approved and that they are seen to be fit for purpose and reflect the income that can be generated, before they can be rented.
3. This licensing legislation should require landlords to be responsible for the condition of their properties, and especially health and safety and the behaviour of their tenants.
4. A public register of the owners or management companies of all rented properties.
5. Local Authorities should be given the legislative power to license these HMOs and also be made responsible for the inspection of same.
6. A limit of 3 months rent be put on the amount a landlord can ask for in advance.
7. We are calling on our legislators to make immediate changes to planning laws, requiring that planning applications should be a statutory requirement for the change of use of a two to three bedroom residential property being converted to a house multi occupancy with up to 5/10 bedrooms.

Private Residential Tenancies Board

Registration of all new tenancies with the PRTB is a requirement since 2004. Failure to register is an offence with a fine of up to €3,000 or six months imprisonment. A survey in our own area in 2017 and again in November 2020 shows that out of approximately 245 rented properties, 157 did not appear to be registered with the PRTB. This despite the PRTB stating that it will rigorously pursue non-compliance by landlords and registration being a statutory requirement since 2012.

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