

Lancashire Combined Fire Authority

Performance Committee

Meeting to be held on 11 March 2026

Houses in Multiple Occupation

Contact for further information – Sam Pink, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)

Tel: 01772 866801

Executive Summary

This paper supports the presentation to Performance Committee and provides an overview of Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service's (LFRS) risk-based approach to managing fire risk in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), including the scale of the risk, recent fire and enforcement data, emerging pressures, and the collaborative arrangements in place with Local Housing Authorities.

Recommendation

The Performance Committee is asked to note the report.

Context

HMOs represent a complex area of risk due to high occupancy levels, shared facilities, and (often) the vulnerability of residents. While Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) are the lead regulator for most HMOs, LFRS retains responsibility under the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 for higher-risk and more complex premises, including taller buildings and mixed-use accommodation.

Scale of the Risk and Resourcing

- Lancashire has over 68,000 regulated premises, with HMOs forming a significant and growing component of residential risk.
- The current three-year Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP) identifies 5,085 high and very high-risk premises.
- A fully established Protection establishment (Level 4 competent staff) provides capacity for up to 3,000 audits per year.
- To maintain a three-year intervention cycle, the Service aims to complete 1,500 high-risk audits per annum, prioritising premises that present the greatest life risk.

HMO Definition and Regulatory Responsibility

- An HMO is defined as a property occupied by three or more tenants forming more than one household, sharing basic facilities.
- Larger HMOs are those with five or more tenants.
- Local Housing Authorities are the lead regulator for most HMOs, including licensed and unlicensed properties.
- LFRS acts as the enforcing authority for higher-risk premises, such as:
 - HMOs within mixed-use buildings,
 - Taller and more complex residential layouts,
 - Hostels, hotels, and accommodation managed by local authorities.

This dual- regulatory framework requires strong coordination to ensure risk is effectively managed without duplication.

Local Intelligence and Incident Data

- Local authority data indicates several hundred known HMOs across Lancashire, with the majority being below three storeys, but a smaller number of 3–6 storey HMOs that present elevated risk.
- Between 2021 and 2025, LFRS attended 125 primary fires in HMOs:
 - 63% occurred in licensed HMOs,
 - 33% where licensing status was unknown,
 - 4% in known unlicensed HMOs.

Regulatory Activity and Outcomes

- Since 2021, LFRS has undertaken significant regulatory activity within HMOs, including audits, enforcement notices, alterations, and prohibitions.
- Enforcement action has been used proportionately to address serious deficiencies and manage risk where compliance could not be achieved through advice or informal measures.

Emerging Risk Pressures

- Rapid growth in small (3–4 person) HMOs that fall outside licensing schemes, reducing visibility and oversight.
- Increased investor ownership, often by individuals based outside the area, making engagement and compliance more challenging.
- Growing use of HMOs as supported accommodation, housing residents with increased vulnerability, which elevates life risk and complexity.

Collaborative Approach

LFRS works closely with all Lancashire Local Housing Authorities through:

- A formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU),
- Selective licensing and joint initiatives targeting higher- risk HMOs and rogue landlords,
- Information sharing and coordinated enforcement activity,
- Attendance at pan- Lancashire housing leads forums,
- Continual safeguarding and signposting through prevention pathways (e.g. Home Fire Safety Checks (HFSC) / Business Fire Safety Checks (BFSC)),
- National leadership on improving premises risk data, including development of improved local data systems.

Business Risk

Medium - a failure to maintain effective collaborative working arrangements with other regulators and fulfil our statutory duty could result in reputational and assurance challenge.

Environmental Impact

None.

Equality & Diversity Implications

None.

HR Implications

None.

Financial Implications

None.

Legal Implications

Medium.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of background papers

Paper:

Date:

Contact: