Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council

Title of Report:	**Houses in Multiple Occupancy Update Report**
Committee Report Submitted To:	**Environmental Services Committee**
Date of Meeting:	**10th November 2026**
For Decision or For Information	**For Decision**
To be discussed In Committee	**No**

Linkage to Council Strategy (2026-31)	
Strategic Theme	Healthy, Active and Engaged Communities
Outcome	To provide an update on the activity of the NIHMO service.
Lead Officer	Head of Health & Built Environment

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	Nil
Included in Current Year Estimates	N/A
Capital/Revenue	N/A
Code	N/A
Staffing Costs	N/A

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	**YES (by BCC legal services)**
Legal Opinion Obtained	**YES (by BCC legal services)**

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 This report provides an update on the current suspension of the NIHMO Service's;

1. online facility which provides the public with access to specific entries from the HMO register; and
2. the online HMO licence application consultation register

This decision followed the public disorder in parts of Northern Ireland in and around 9 June 2026 during which homes, businesses and vehicles were targeted and set alight in parts of Northern Ireland.

The aim of this report is to seek the views of members on whether these facilities should be reinstated to the NIHMO website.

2.0 Background

2.1 By way of background, prior to the transfer of the HMO function, the Housing Executive maintained a publicly available register of registered HMOs to allow tenants to make an informed decision that the accommodation they were considering renting was safe, good quality and well managed and this was welcomed by many landlords as an opportunity to promote their registered HMOs with the register being seen as providing a commercial advantage over rogue unregistered landlords.

2.2 The Councils, following the transfer of the function and the new Licencing Scheme in April 2019 continued with this approach and via the NIHMO website, allowed access to the same, limited information, which was previously published by the Housing Executive, and which is typically available in the public domain via other sources, that being –

- Property address
- Permitted occupancy
- Start & expiry dates

2.3 Table 1 details the number of licensed HMOs in each council area on 30 September 2026

Table 1

Row Labels	Count by Council Area	Permitted Occupancy
Antrim and Newtownabbey	15	70
Ards and North Down	13	81
Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon	59	331
Belfast	3020	13186
Causeway Coast and Glens	214	933
Derry City and Strabane	261	1247
Fermanagh and Omagh	5	20

Lisburn and Castlereagh	8	45
Mid and East Antrim	13	82
Mid Ulster	21	152
Newry Mourne and Down	18	96
Grand Total	**3647**	**16243**

Recent Disorder

2.4 On 9 June 2026, violent riots broke out across Belfast and other parts of Northern Ireland following a knife attack allegedly committed by a Sudanese man the previous evening. A number of people were made homeless after their properties were attacked and set on fire by rioters.

2.5 NIHMO officers became aware that several HMO properties had been targeted as part of the unrest and therefore, on 10th June 2026, it took the precautionary measure of removing from its website, those publicly available entries from the HMO register as well as the online application consultation register (a similar precautionary measure was taken following similar riots in Ballymena in June 2025).

2.6 A list of HMO addresses, where it was claimed that immigrants were living, was also circulated on social media, which the PSNI described as "*totally unacceptable*". The PSNI stated that anyone who shared the list "*may be committing a criminal offence*".

HMO Register

2.7 The introduction of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 ("2016 Act") aimed to ensure the effective oversight and regulation of HMO accommodation for the benefit of the public at large. In particular, section 62 of the 2016 Act requires councils to keep an HMO register containing details of each application for an HMO licence, the decision made on the application and subsequent progress of the licence.

2.8 The HMO register is required to contain the following information –

i. the name of the applicant;
ii. the address of the living accommodation in question;
iii. the name of any managing agent specified in the application;
iv. the date on which the application was made;
v. the name of the licence holder;
vi. the number of persons authorised to occupy the HMO (as specified in the licence under section 7(3)(c));
vii. any conditions included in the licence;
viii. any variation, revocation or surrender of the licence under section 22, 23 or 27;
ix. any revocation order or disqualification order made

2.9 An entry in the register is to be available to any person who appears to the Council

(a) *to have an interest or prospective interest in the HMO,*
(b) *to be a resident of the HMO, or*
(c) to be otherwise sufficiently concerned with the information contained in the entry.

Online consultation register

2.10 The Houses in Multiple Occupation (Notice of Application) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019 ("2019 Regulations") make provision about the procedural requirements relating to an application for an HMO licence, particularly the requirements for the giving of notice of the making of an application for an HMO licence.

2.11 An applicant is required to publish notice of the application in a newspaper circulating in the locality of the HMO and the applicant must supply a copy of that advert to the council.

2.12 The newspaper advert must contain the following information;

(a) the name of the applicant;
(b) the address of the HMO to which the notice relates;
(c) the proposed occupancy level;
(d) the council district in which the HMO is situated and to which the licence application will be submitted; and
(e) the notice of a right to make representations about the application.

2.13 *Regulation 4* of the 2019 Regulation requires the Council to publish notice of the application on its website, to allow any person wishing to make representations, the opportunity to do so, within 28 days of the application being published online.

2.14 *Regulation 5* states that *"the council may exclude an applicant from the requirement to publish notice of an application if it is satisfied that publishing such a notice would be likely to jeopardise the safety or welfare of any persons or the security of any premises."*

2.15 The online consultation register currently remains suspended although individual applicants continue to publish notice of their applications in newspapers circulating in the locality of the HMO.

Representations received

2.16 *Home Office*

2.17 On the 10 June 2026, the Home Office and representatives of Mears Housing (the appointed Home Office asylum accommodation provider) contacted the NIHMO Service requesting that it suspend access to the abovementioned

entries of the HMO register as well as be granted exemption from the requirement to publish notice of its applications on the grounds that the information was being used to target migrant and asylum seeker accommodation. Mears believed that a failure to do so would be likely to jeopardise the safety or welfare of the occupants / HMO owners and managers or the security of the HMO accommodation.

2.18 *LANI and various individual HMO owners and Managing Agents*

2.19 The Landlords Association for Northern Ireland ("LANI") and individual HMO owners and Managing Agents contacted the NIHMO Service following what they described as the recent targeting of HMO properties following publication of a list of HMO addresses (which they termed a '*hit list*') from the NIHMO Service website.

2.20 They stated that HMO properties *"have been identified and circulated online in a manner that has encouraged hostility towards occupants. This has caused serious alarm and required police involvement."* The NIHMO Service has also been contacted by a number of tenants expressing concern regarding their personal safety.

2.21 The NIHMO Service has been made aware of an attack on the offices of an HMO manager and the issuing of personal safety advice / warning to an HMO owner / manager by the PSNI. Additionally, the NIHMO Service is aware of protests outside the offices of known HMO Managing Agents and several Council offices in relation to HMOs.

2.22 Those owners and managers have requested that these online entries from the HMO register are not reinstated and if the council takes the decision to reinstate them, they have requested that their particular properties are exempted. The NIHMO Service would estimate that those HMO owners, managers or those represented by LANI who have contacted us, would represent over 50% of the total HMO stock in Northern Ireland.

Planning Act (NI) 2011

2.23 Separate to any provision under the 2016 Act, section 242 of the Planning Act (NI) 2011 requires Councils to keep a register containing information in relation to the processing and determination of planning applications made to the authority. Section 242(3) of the 2011 Act requires that this register must be available for inspection by the public.

2.24 The proposals contained in this paper would not affect any Council's responsibility to hold and maintain a register as required by the 2011 Act. It should be noted that some information relating to Houses of Multiple Occupation may still therefore be in the public domain. This matter is being considered separately.

The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers in Northern Ireland (SOLACE NI)

2.25 On the 4 September 2026 an update paper on the current suspension of the NIHMO Services online facility which provides the public with access to specific entries from the HMO register; and the online HMO licence application consultation register was presented to SOLACE NI.

2.26 SOLACE NI agreed that –

1. Public access to the online facility containing entries from the HMO register is not reinstated at this time but shall be reviewed annually, and

2. The HMO application online consultation register is reinstated on the 1 December 2026

Consultation with Statutory Agencies

2.27 The Department of Justice facilitated a meeting between the Home Office, NI Housing Executive, Belfast City Council, PSNI and the Department for Communities on the 29 September 2026 to discuss concerns around the publication of HMO accommodation addresses and associated security considerations.

2.28 There was a recognition from some of the partner agencies that the online publicly available entries from the HMO register were shared on social media and may have been a contributing factor during the June 2026 disturbances.

3.0 Evaluation of the Issues

3.1 In determining the arguments for and against, councils have to balance their statutory obligations as well as the clear legislative intention to improve standards, promote transparency and secure the effective regulation of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) against the rights and concerns of licence holders and other relevant persons.

1. Should the NIHMO Unit re-instate access to the previously available online entries of the HMO Register?

3.2 The arguments in favour of re-instating access are –

- that it would promote accountability and transparency in relation to the Council's HMO licensing functions pursuant to the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016;
- that it enables debate on the concentration of HMO accommodation in specific localities,
- that it would allow tenants to check the licence status of any potential accommodation that they are considering renting;
- access to these entries helps hold rogue landlords accountable;

3.3 The arguments in favour of maintaining the suspension are -

- the attacks on HMO accommodation including sustained periods of civil unrest / rioting during which HMO tenants were forced to flee from their homes;
- the significance and sensitivity of the information, including a list of HMOs being linked by police to anti-immigrant attacks;
- the information relates to the accommodation of individuals, or groups of individuals where disclosure could lead to them being threatened or harassed (e.g. asylum seekers, ex-offenders);
- the information could provide intelligence allowing known individuals to be targeted;
- attacks on business and other property owned by HMO owners / managers;
- personal safety warning to an HMO owner / manager by the PSNI;
- requests from HMO owners, managers and tenants to have details of their HMO accommodation excluded from the NIHMO Service's website as disclosure is likely to jeopardise (a) the safety or welfare of any person, or (b) the security of any premises;
- the reputational damage to the council if the online entries were used by nefarious actors to target HMO accommodation and / or HMO tenants, owners or managers which resulted in their safety or welfare being compromised or properties being damaged or destroyed.

2. Should the NIHMO Unit reinstate the online application consultation register?

3.4 The arguments in favour of re-instating the online application consultation register are –

- that it would promote accountability and transparency in relation to the Council's HMO licensing functions pursuant to the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016;
- that it would allow for more informed debate on HMO licensing;
- that it enables debate on the concentration of HMO accommodation in specific localities,
- that the publication of the register helps hold rogue landlords accountable;
- the council's mandatory statutory obligations pursuant to Regulation 4 of the 2019 Regulations which requires councils to publish notice of HMO licence applications on its website, to allow the public to make representations in relation to a licence application.
- Pursuant to Regulation 5 of the Houses in Multiple Occupation Act (Northern Ireland) 2016 the council can consider specific requests to exclude an applicant from the requirement to publish notice of an application on the grounds that publishing such a notice would be likely to jeopardise the safety or welfare of any persons or the security of any premises.

3.5 The arguments in favour of maintaining the suspension are –

- the attacks on HMO accommodation including sustained periods of civil unrest / rioting during which HMO tenants were forced to flee from their homes;
- the significance and sensitivity of the information, including a list of HMOs being linked by police to anti-immigrant attacks;
- the information relates to the accommodation of individuals, or groups of individuals where disclosure could lead to them being threatened or harassed (e.g. asylum seekers, ex-offenders);
- the information could provide intelligence allowing known individuals to be targeted;
- attacks on business and other property owned by HMO owners / managers;
- personal safety warning to an HMO owner / manager by the PSNI;
- requests from HMO owners, managers and tenants to have details of their HMO accommodation excluded from the NIHMO Service's website as disclosure is likely to jeopardise (a) the safety or welfare of any person, or (b) the security of any premises.
- the reputational damage to the council if the online consultation register was used by nefarious actors to target HMO accommodation and / or HMO tenants, owners or managers which resulted in their safety or welfare being compromised or properties being damaged or destroyed.

4.0 Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that the Environmental Services Committee recommends to Council that –

(i) The public access to the online facility containing entries from the HMO register is not reinstated at this time but shall be reviewed annually**.** Officers attributed strong weight to following matters in making this recommendation:

1. the attacks on HMO accommodation including sustained periods of civil unrest / rioting during which HMO tenants were forced to flee from their homes recent disorder and;
2. the significance and sensitivity of the information, including a list of HMOs being linked by police to anti-immigrant attacks;
3. reported attacks on business and other property owned by HMO owners / managers;
4. reported personal safety warning to an HMO owner / manager by the PSNI

(ii) The HMO application online consultation register is reinstated on the 1 December 2026, having particular regard to the significant weight that must be attributed to Councils' statutory obligations under The Houses in Multiple Occupation (Notice of Application) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2019 ("2019 Regulations") and the opportunity for applicants to make specific requests to be exempted from the requirements of same.