

Mark calls for improved fire safety in HMOs

A city MP has pushed for improvements in fire safety following a tragedy in Fishermead.

Mark Lancaster spoke in Thursday's debate on houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), highlighting the tragic deaths of Bola Ejifunmilayo and her daughter Fiyin in September.

He said: "I am sorry to say that the debate is particularly relevant to my constituency. I have long pushed for tougher measures on HMOs, given the various problems that they have caused in Milton Keynes."

Responding to Mr Lancaster, Lib Dem Minister Andrew Stunnell defended Coalition Government changes to planning legislation introduced on October 1 that are currently being challenged by the Lib Dem-led Milton Keynes Council.

While colleagues spoke about the impact on quality of life by such properties - something Mr Lancaster raised in his own adjournment debate in 2007 - his focus was fire safety.

After all, while 2 per cent of UK houses were HMOs in 2007, a staggering 33 per cent of fire deaths that year happened in multiple-occupancy properties.

Mr Lancaster highlighted the importance of smoke alarms and self-closing doors in HMOs, as well as describing the risks they pose when converted.

Last Monday he accompanied Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service on a HMO inspection, during which they checked properties had measures such as fire extinguishers and blankets, means of escape and doors with inbuilt locks.

Not only are known HMOs inspected, but when they are listed as such, the fire service can prepare for this type of incident en route. He asked for the prioritisation of their registration.

He outlined the 'LACORS' agreement in Milton Keynes, whereby the local authority takes the lead in inspections, with back up from the fire service.

However, councils have to give 24 hours' notice before inspections, but fire authorities can enter immediately. As a result, the deputy chief fire officer has written to the leader of Milton Keynes council, offering the authority the fire service's more dynamic powers.

Mr Lancaster called for fire services to be put back into the driving seat, adding: "It is no wonder that the fire service is so keen to help. It is the fire service that has to deal with the consequences. Officers would rather visit homes and install fire safety precautions than tackle a fire."