

## What to do now?

Amber Rudd has written to me to say that it is possible for her write to the Local Government Ombudsman to ask for an investigation on the grounds of maladministration. My preferred route is to appoint a specialist firm of lawyers to make a formal complaint to the Ombudsman for maladministration as a first step and then go forward. If you would like contact Amber Rudd on this matter, you may Email her at [amber.rudd.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:amber.rudd.mp@parliament.uk). You can view documents relating to the case at [selcha.com](http://selcha.com). You can contact me.

Among other questions that Hastings Borough Council has to answer is: Did it take the sensible precaution of commissioning a feasibility study before launching the licensing scheme, the overall cost of which was tens of millions of pounds(?), at a time of financial crisis and austerity in the country? Did it establish even a rough idea of the cost? Did it understand that much of the cost in the shape of service charges would have to be paid by flat owners some of whom were in their seventies or eighties who did not have the money to pay, and tenants in the form of rent increases and all this at a time of the severest financial crisis the country has known?

Did Hastings Borough Council understand that six years after the launch of the scheme, many in Hastings would be suffering hardship and the worst housing crises the town has ever known? Was all this capped by the charging of millions of pounds in illegal fees?

The demand for money for selective licenses in properties that had already been licensed as HMOs with the threat of criminal proceedings if we didn't pay is a breach of our fundamental rights and cannot be allowed. We should have at least been warned that we had the right to appeal to the First Tier Property Tribunal which has been acknowledged to me by Hastings Borough Council.

Hastings Borough Council did know that up to the financial crisis of 2008, the cost of installing the fire safety alarm system required by a HMO license carried with it a 70% council grant. Two years later, was it really the right time for Hastings Borough Council to impose the 100% cost of this work onto people many of whom were old and vulnerable and had no means to pay for the work while Hastings Borough Council raked in £1,000 license fees by the thousands.

Fire protection is desirable, but old people can have death precipitated by money worry and the young and old do not live long when they find themselves homeless.

Peter Rochford