Communal Areas Policy

Version Number	1.1
Date Applies From	01/08/24
Policy Owner	Executive Director of Customer
Next Review Date	01/08/27
Strategy Link	Customer focused and equitable services Safe, well maintained, sustainable and affordable homes

Key connected legislation/regulation:

- Occupiers Liability Act 1957
- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- Torts (interference with Goods) Act 1977
- Housing Act 2004
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Furniture and Furnishings (Fire Safety) Regulations 1988
- Local Government Association “Fire safety in Purpose-built Blocks of Flats”
- Fire Safety Act 2021
- Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022

Annual Checks

Policy owners should ensure that an annual check of hyperlinks, roles, and names is undertaken. These checks are in addition to formal review process. Please see Policy and Procedure framework guidance for further details.

If you need this information in an alternative language please call

0161 605 7260

For other formats please call

0300 123 5522

Introduction

This policy sets out ForHousing's approach to ensuring that all communal areas are well kept, meet all regulatory requirements and are a safe place for residents, their visitors, contractors and ForHousing staff. In order to achieve this, ForHousing operates a zero tolerance, sterile areas approach.

A sterile areas approach means that residents and their visitors are not permitted to use communal areas to store or dispose of their belongings or rubbish.

Policy

This Policy applies to all internal and external common parts of blocks of flats to ensure they are kept free of obstructions or hazards to protect the health and safety of tenants and other users of the buildings.

A communal area is any area that is not within the confines of the tenant's property. For example - corridors, balconies, stairways, landings, lobbies, meter cupboards, external gardens, bin stores, entrances to buildings, garages, and parking areas.

Scope of the Policy

The Policy applies to all tenants, leaseholders, employees, contractors, and anyone else using the internal and external communal areas of ForHousing residential premises. The following areas are included:

- Internal communal corridors, for example porches, entrance halls, landings, staircases
- Internal shared facilities, for example bin stores, bin chutes, meter cupboards, laundries
- Internal social facilities, for example communal lounges, kitchens, guest rooms
- External areas, for example communal gardens, through routes and shared balconies.

Examples of obstructions and hazards include, but are not limited to:

- Rubbish and other items such as furniture awaiting disposal
- Furnishings such as mats, pictures on walls, and flowerpots
- Bicycles, motorised cycles, prams, scooters, wheelchairs and mobility scooters
- Hardware such as tools, paint, garden equipment etc.
- Personal effects such as storage boxes / containers, toys, barbecues etc.

Background and Context

ForHousing has a legal duty to ensure all reasonable precautions are taken, to keep premises under its control, safe and free from hazards. It is therefore important to ensure that there are no obstructions in communal areas that could:

- Contribute to the spread of fire
- Create accidental fires by their combustible nature
- Prevent or reduce tenants ability to escape in the event of fire
- Produce smoke
- Hinder or prevent Emergency Services in rescue duties

- Injure people by causing trips and falls

The only exception may be where a resident has a cognitive disability such as dementia, which means they need to store a specific item in the communal corridor adjacent to their home to act as a memory aide. Where this is the case, the requirement will be documented following a person centered fire risk assessment and agreed via the permissions process, which is detailed below.

Internal Social Facilities

Some sheltered, extra care schemes, supported and general needs premises, have communal social facilities such as lounges and kitchens. Where this is the case, all furniture and furnishings will be provided or approved by ForHousing and will be risk assessed to ensure that they do not pose a health and safety risk. Tenants' belongings must not be stored or left in these areas.

On occasion, tenants may be given permission to store a specific item or install decorations / items relating to religious festivals in shared social facilities. All items must be risk assessed and requests formally agreed by ForHousing. Permission will not be given to place decorations such as wreaths on individual flat doors.

External Areas

Where a premises has shared external facilities such as a communal garden or yard, ForHousing will provide and/or approve all furniture and equipment, for example seating and planters. However, tenants may be given permission to place some items in these areas, for example hanging baskets or garden furniture. All requests must be formally agreed by ForHousing via the permissions process detailed below.

Storage Cupboards Located Within Communal Areas and Stairwells

Residents are not permitted to store any items in any cupboards, including service and meter cupboards located within the communal areas.

Permissions Process

ForHousing will operate a permissions process, whereby residents can request to store their belongings in either the internal shared social facilities or external areas of a building in which they live. This process does not apply to internal communal areas, such as landings, stairwells or internal shared facilities, such as meter cupboards.

The items requested must not pose an obstruction or hazard to residents or others occupying the building. Requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis and will be reviewed by a manager responsible for the relevant building. ForHousing reserves the right to decline or withdraw permission at any time. Any decision will be confirmed in writing.

Removal of Items and Potential Enforcement Action

ForHousing reserves the right to immediately remove and safely dispose of any items left within the communal area; this includes, but is not limited to, gas cannisters, bulk rubbish, sofas, mattresses, electric scooters, mobility scooters, bicycles, motorcycles, door mats, potted

plants, pictures, shelving.

The items will be stored for a period of one calendar month, during which time the owner may pay a fee to have their belongings released. Any items unclaimed at the end of the one month period will be disposed of.

Where a tenant repeatedly leaves their belongings within the communal area, legal action may be considered.

Responsibilities under this Policy

The Senior Leadership Team and Heads of Service will have the responsibility to ensure that this policy is adhered to and that there is monthly performance reporting of all key activities, e.g. weekly communal inspections undertaken as part of the cleaning contract, Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs) due and undertaken and FRA actions (maintenance and management).

The Head of Building & Fire Safety and Fire Safety Lead will review all FRA actions to ensure they are properly assigned, managed and actioned.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

We value diversity and work to create an inclusive environment for our customers and colleagues, where everyone has access to the same opportunities. We welcome our responsibility to comply with equalities legislation and regulatory requirements that relate to equity, diversity and inclusion and aim to do more. Through our activities we aim to remove systemic barriers to equal opportunities and eliminate all forms of discrimination, harassment, and victimisation within our organisation.

We are committed to providing excellent customer services, which are fair, equitable and inclusive. As such, we will endeavour to understand and make any reasonable adjustments required for customers in line with ForHousing's Reasonable Adjustment Statement and the Equality Act 2010. Any reasonable adjustment provided will be recorded and kept under active review.

Implementation and Communication

All ForHousing employees who in the course of their role have reason to visit ForHousing properties with internal or external communal areas, will have day-to-day responsibility for delivering this policy and the associated procedure.

If employees become aware that there are problems with the effective operation of this Policy or the associated procedures, they should report this to the Policy Owner. This feedback will be incorporated into the policy and procedural review process

Monitoring, Recording, Reporting

ForHousing will monitor and report performance in compliance with this Policy through the in-house IT system, performance indicators and customer satisfaction feedback.

This Communal Areas Policy will be available to all employees through the intranet and via ForHousing websites for customers and partner agencies. Regular training will be provided to relevant employees on all such policies and procedures.

Related Documents

- Fire Safety Policy
- Adaptations Policy
- Communal Areas Procedure

Co-production

The Policy was reviewed in consultation with colleagues of ForHousing.

Approval & Review History

With effect from 23/10/2024 the approval route for the Communal Areas Policy is:

- SLT - EMT

Date	Version	Approved by	Detail
01/08/24	1	EMT Representative	New policy.
06/12/24	1.1	n/a	Placed onto new template.