



Fire Safety in Communal Areas Policy

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Board of Management / Committee name	Board of Management
Approval date	2 nd October 2017
Implementation date	<i>This policy is subject to tenant consultation before being implemented full</i>
Review date	October 2020
Version	Version 1

Version	Date approved	Changes
Version 1	2 nd October 2017	New Policy

1. Introduction

Langstane Housing Association strives to ensure the safety of its tenants and takes its moral and legal responsibilities in this regard very seriously.

The Association has seen the incidence of fire within Association properties increase in recent years. In response, the Association has implemented a rolling programme of fire safety risk assessments, which have identified inappropriate storage of materials and belongings in communal areas as a significant risk to tenants. This policy is intended to set out a clear and consistent approach to managing fire safety in communal areas.

The policy considers the approach to belongings being stored in communal areas, but also sets out the Association's approach to wider fire safety including undertaking fire risk assessments, maintaining fire equipment and ensuring tenants are fire aware.

For the purposes of this policy, a communal area is any area within a development that is not within the confines of a tenants property. Such areas include corridors, stairwells, meter cupboards, basements, bin stores, external common gardens, entrances to buildings and car parks

2. Policy statement

This policy is intended to ensure that staff and tenants have a clear and consistent set of guidelines for managing the storage of belongings in communal areas. The policy also sets out the Association's approach to wider fire safety issues within its properties.

3. Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to maintain fire safety in communal areas of developments by:

- Setting out a clear, consistent approach to the storage and removal of unauthorised belongings in communal areas
- Setting out requirements for fire risk assessments and inspections of communal areas
- Setting out requirements for servicing and maintenance of fire equipment in communal areas
- Setting out the approach to ensuring tenants are fire aware

4. Links to other policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- The Association's Health & Safety Policy
- Accompanying Fire Safety procedures

5. Policy

5.1 Evacuation Plans

All the Association's flatted blocks will have Fire Evacuation Plans displayed in the communal area¹. Tenants will be encouraged to familiarise themselves with their escape routes and to form their own personal evacuation plan for themselves and their family should an emergency situation arise.

The Association will provide new tenants with a leaflet providing information on fire safety and guidance on preparing a personal evacuation plan. This leaflet will also be made available on the Association's website for existing tenants.

In the event of a fire, tenants must evacuate their building in accordance with the displayed Fire Evacuation Plan.

5.2 Fire risk assessments

Fire risk assessments will be carried out by a competent person (normally external consultancy) for all communal areas within blocks of flats owned by the Association and these will be reviewed on a periodic basis as follows:

- Lower risk – low rise, modern, general needs tenant group – every 3 years
- Higher risk – four or more storeys, older property, social factors – every 2 years

Fire risk assessments may be reviewed sooner where:

- Physical alterations are made to the building including changes to material finishes
- There is a significant non-physical change to the building, for instance a change from general needs accommodation to supported accommodation
- There is reason to suspect the original fire risk assessment may no longer be valid, for instance the behaviour of a recent fire
- Improvement works have been carried out as identified by a fire risk assessment and the fire safety of the building requires to be reassessed

¹ Fire Evacuation Plans will be installed during 2017 - 2019

5.3 Fire safety improvement plans

Improvement actions identified by the fire safety risk assessments will either be dealt with immediately or added to the planned maintenance fire safety improvement plan, depending on the urgency of the action. Improvement actions may include items such as upgrading fire doors, installing emergency lighting or improving fire signage.

5.4 Belongings in communal areas

Inappropriate storage of belongings in communal areas is an issue that is highlighted in the majority of fire risk assessments undertaken by the Association.

There are two approaches to managing this issue:

- Zero tolerance – no belongings are allowed within communal areas under any circumstances, or
- Managed use – certain low risk items are allowed in communal areas with permission, and providing that they do not inhibit safe escape from the building or create a fire risk

The Association will adopt a zero tolerance approach to belongings in communal areas and will not permit any items to be stored in communal areas including in stairwells, corridors or under stairs.

This approach is being adopted in response to a number of malicious fires started in communal areas of the Association's properties in recent years. An accumulation of belongings in communal areas provides fuel to start a fire and will create a spread of smoke and flame, blocking escape routes.

For clarity, belongings will include (but are not limited to):

- Flammable liquids or gases, including items containing flammable liquids or gases, for example:
 - Patio heaters or barbecues
 - Paints or solvent based materials
 - Gas heaters or pressurised cylinders
 - Motorcycles / mopeds
 - Petrol driven gardening equipment
 - Portable generators

(In accordance with the Tenant Handbook, flammable items should not be stored within tenants homes either).

- Mobility scooters, wheelchairs, walking frames
- Any recycling, waste or wheelie bins

- Clothes, shoes, boots, wellingtons etc
- Any electrical equipment
- Any exercise equipment, for example exercise bike, cross trainer, weights etc
- Clothes drying equipment
- Gardening equipment
- Festive decorations, Christmas trees etc
- Prams or buggies
- Bicycles (see exception below) including electric bicycles
- Children's toys
- Any items of furniture (chairs, tables, storage units, mattresses etc)
- Curtains, net curtains, blinds on communal windows
- Pictures, posters or other flammable wall coverings
- Carpets, rugs or runners
- Plant pots and plants, artificial flowers
- Any other items identified as a fire hazard or an obstruction to an escape route

The only exceptions:

The Association will allow:

- Bicycles (not electric). In some common areas bike hangers have been provided and tenants are permitted to use these to store bicycles. Where hangers are provided these must be used – any bicycles which are not stored on hangers will be treated as unauthorised belongings. Where hangers are not provided, bicycles must not be stored in communal areas.
- Door mats. Tenants may have a door mat at their flat entrance door. The door mat must have a non-slip backing and should be approximately 40 x 60cm in size. Off cuts of carpet should not be used as door mats.

5.5 Communal area inspections

Formal fire safety risk assessments will be carried out at regular intervals as per section 5.2.

In addition, Estates Assistants or the Stock Condition Surveyor will carry out informal fire checks when visiting developments, usually at least once every 3 months, using the checklist provided at Appendix 1. Checks will be registered in the fire log on site to avoid duplication.

All staff visiting developments will be aware of the need to visually check for fire risks and report these to the Asset Management or Housing team. In particular staff should check and report:

- Damaged fire equipment e.g. smoke vent windows stuck in the open position, emergency lighting not working, fire exit signage damaged
- Fire doors which do not close properly or block entrance doors which are not secure
- Trip hazards on escape routes e.g. loose flooring, unauthorised belongings
- Other safety risks on escape routes including evidence of smoking in communal areas, loose handrails, damaged plasterboard linings

5.6 Dealing with unauthorised belongings

Where unauthorised belongings are being stored in a communal area, the Estates Assistant or Housing Officer will attempt to locate the owner to have the items removed.

Where the owner cannot be located the items will be photographed and uplifted, either by the Association's handy man or by an external contractor. Items with a value of over £150 (for instance bicycles, prams etc) will be kept in storage for 21 days before being disposed of. All other items will be disposed of immediately.

Where the owner is identified, but the items are not removed from the communal areas, the Association will arrange uplift and invoice the owner for the cost.

Owners wishing to reclaim valuable items from storage must cover the removal and storage costs for the items before the items are returned.

Where the Association has to repeatedly remove unauthorised items from communal areas at a particular development, and the owner cannot be identified, the Association reserves the right to invoice all properties in that block for a share of the removal and disposal costs.

5.7 Prevention

The most effective way to implement fire safety is to ensure that tenants are fire aware and have as much information and advice about fire safety and potential fire risks as possible. The following methods will be used to educate tenants on fire safety:

5.7.1 Information at initial allocation visit

During the allocation visit, the allocating officer will highlight evacuation notices and fire escape routes to potential tenants, as well as explaining responsibilities under the zero tolerance approach to belongings.

5.7.2 Tenant pack at sign-up

The tenant pack provided to tenants when they move in to an Association property will include a copy of the Scottish Fire Service's 'Your Guide to Fire safety' and the

Association's own 'Fire safety in Communal Areas' leaflet. New tenants will be advised of any specific fire measures relating to their home when they sign their tenancy.

5.7.3 Newsletter and website

The tenant newsletter and Association website will be used to periodically remind tenants of the risks of fire and preventative measures that can be taken to reduce the risks.

5.7.4 Scheme noticeboards

Fire resistant notice boards will be located in all flatted blocks. Notice boards will be used to display fire safety notices, draw attention to unauthorised items which have been removed to storage or disposed of and will highlight any fire safety initiatives that tenants might wish to take advantage of.

5.7.5 Fire safety home checks

The Scottish Fire and Rescue Service provide free home checks – information on how to access this service will be provided to new tenants in their tenant pack, and a link will be made available on the Association's website. Tenants will be encouraged to take advantage of the free home check once they have settled in to their new home.

5.8 Alterations

Tenants should be aware that changes they make to their home can impact on the fire safety of the block that they live in. Tenants should not:

- Tamper with or remove door closers on fire doors within their property
- Tamper with, cover or remove smoke detectors, CO detectors or heat detectors within their property
- Damage plasterboard linings on separating walls within their property (the wall that separates one flat from another)
- Replace existing electrical fittings (light fittings, sockets etc) without approval from the Association.
- Make changes to their flat entrance door or door frame, as this could reduce the integrity and fire performance of the door.

Where a tenant has made changes to their property that could impact on the fire safety of their property or the block they live in, the Association will recharge the tenant for any remedial works required to restore the property's fire integrity.

In communal areas, the following are vital to maintain fire safety and should not be tampered with:

- Plasterboard linings within communal areas – these are intended to reduce the spread of fire throughout a building and damage to the plasterboard linings can reduce their integrity, causing a fire to spread more quickly.
- Communal smoke detectors or fire alarms – these are intended to give tenants early warning of a fire to allow time to escape
- Fire signage and emergency lighting – these are intended to assist tenants with escape in the event of an emergency. Escape routes may be filled with black smoke and emergency lighting and fire signage can provide much needed assistance in identifying escape routes.
- Smoke ventilation within communal areas – this ensures that smoke is vented from escape routes and avoids tenants becoming overcome by smoke during their escape

If tenants notice that any of these items are damaged they should report this to the Association on 01224 423000

Smoking in communal areas is not permitted.

5.9 Storage

Where there is a clear issue with a lack of storage at developments, the Association will consider ways of providing external storage (for example bike storage) to prevent the accumulation of belongings in stairwells. This will be subject to funding being available, and will be subject to there being sufficient external grounds on which to site the storage facilities.

5.10 Maintenance of fire equipment

Where fire equipment has been provided, the Association will ensure that it is maintained in accordance with manufacturers' recommendations and legal requirements. This equipment may include:

- Emergency lighting
- Fire alarms systems
- Dry risers
- Smoke ventilation windows
- Fire signage
- Fire extinguishers

The type of equipment provided at each development will depend on the design and layout of the communal areas, the height of the building and the age of the building.

The Association will maintain accurate records of fire equipment maintenance.

5.11 Communal smoke detection

The Association's existing flatted properties are a mix of communal areas with smoke detection, and communal areas without smoke detection. Both are acceptable approaches under the current Building Regulations.

The Scottish Government is currently consulting on smoke detection in domestic properties, and one of the issues being considered is whether smoke detection in communal areas is necessary or not. The Association will await the outcome of the consultation (due in early 2018) before finalising an approach to smoke detection in communal areas.

Where smoke detection is provided in communal areas, it will be tested every 6 months.

6. Policy review

The policy will be reviewed every three years, or earlier if required by a change of legislation.:

Right to complain

In the event you are not satisfied with the service you have received, please contact the Association for a copy of the Complaints Policy. This can also be viewed on Langstane Housing Association's website – www.langstane-ha.co.uk.

Equality and diversity

The Langstane Group / Langstane Housing Association is committed to promoting equality and diversity across all areas of work. Discrimination or harassment of any kind is not tolerated.

If you would like this document sent to you in large print, please contact Support Services on 01224 423000.

Appendix 1

Fire safety checklist for Estates Assistants / Stock Condition Surveyor

Block / Scheme				
Inspected by				
Date of inspection				
Item	Yes	No	N/A	Notes
Are escape routes free from clutter and unauthorised belongings?				
Is there evidence of smoking in communal areas?				
Are emergency lights working?				
Are communal smoke detectors in place and undamaged?				
Is fire signage free from damage and legible?				
Are fire doors within communal areas closing fully and undamaged (doors and frames)?				
Are any fire doors within communal areas being propped open?				
Are any flat entrance fire doors / frames damaged?				
Is there evidence of communal smoke vent windows being tampered with or not working (held open, fixed shut etc)				

Are communal floor coverings in good order? (check for loose floor coverings / trip hazards)				
Are stair balustrades and handrails secure?				
Are landlord stores locked?				
Are loft hatches closed and secured?				
Are service ducts in communal areas closed and secured?				
Are wall finishes within communal areas undamaged?				
Are block entrance doors secured? (to prevent unauthorised entry)				
Externally – are paths, bin stores etc free from clutter and flytipping that might provide fuel for fire raising?				
Other notes				