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## 1. Purpose and scope

- 1.1 Since the Grenfell Tower tragedy, and in the light of changes to legislation and good working practice in building and fire safety, Lewisham Council has reviewed its approach to the safe management of shared/communal areas in blocks of flats. While our existing agreements were already based on a clear corridors model, we recognise the importance of clear and consistent messaging to ensure that those accessing or using these buildings understand what this means in practice.
- 1.2 This policy aims to keep residents safe by ensuring communal corridors, walkways, halls, stairs, and landings are kept clear of sources of ignition, potential fuel sources, and obstructions. In summary, the policy aims to keep shared corridors clear. Where specific exceptions apply, these are clearly set out within the policy.
- 1.3 This policy applies to residential buildings owned and managed by Lewisham Council Housing Services, which contain a hall, landing, corridor, or walkway which is shared with one or more other households (see 2.1). It applies to all residents and visitors within these buildings.
- 1.4 This policy includes shared/communal areas in specialist accommodation including sheltered housing schemes. Examples of these areas include but are not restricted to communal lounges, shared kitchens or bathrooms, meeting rooms, store rooms, and under stairways. These areas are within the scope of our wider fire safety management plan and, as such, are considered as part of a building's fire risk assessment.

## 2. Requirements and Enforcement

- 2.1 All shared corridors, walkways, landings, and communal areas [as defined in pa. 1.4], within buildings we manage that contain residential properties, must be kept completely clear at all times. These areas include open and enclosed corridors, shared balconies, landing areas, cupboards within or adjacent to

these areas, as well as all access and exit points to the building – both internal and external.

- 2.2 We do not permit residents to make any alterations to any communal areas, by attaching anything to the fabric of the building including to walls, doors, window-frames, railings, floors, and ceilings. Examples include, but are not limited to washing lines, gates, trellis, hanging planters, aerals, and shelving. We will remove these items and we reserve the right to recharge the costs of removal and repairing damage made to the fabric of the building caused by unauthorised alterations. For more information see our Alterations and Improvements policy.
- 2.3 Following risk assessment, we currently permit the following general exceptions (to 2.1) by each front entrance door:
- All corridors over 1m wide in Sheltered Housing: a maximum of two ceramic or non-flammable metal plant pots of live plants only (walkway clearance after pots must be minimum 1m)
  - All other open corridors over 1m wide: a doormat and a maximum of two ceramic or non-flammable metal plant pots of live plants only (walkway clearance after pots must be minimum 1m)
  - All other enclosed corridors over 1m wide: a doormat only
- 2.4 If we assess the exceptions (in 2.3) to form an unacceptable risk in a particular location, we will require residents to remove them after notification, in order to maintain safety.
- 2.5 We may assess that a building can include fire-safe noticeboards which our Housing Service has specifically approved. An additional exception may be where temporary health and safety signage is placed in these areas by caretakers, other operatives, and contractors who are working in that area. This should be left in place no longer than necessary for the temporary purpose it serves.
- 2.6 Residents must store all items including pushchairs, prams, and bicycles either within their individual property, or in an area Lewisham Council has specifically approved to be used for this purpose. This may be internal or external to the building. Some storage may only be made available for the use of specific types of items, such as bicycles. Items must not be stored in any internal cupboards within communal areas which have not been specifically approved for this use. Under no circumstances may electrical intake cupboards or bin stores be used for storing any personal items.
- 2.7 Where approval is given for items to be stored in a designated area, all items are stored at residents own risk. Lewisham Council takes no responsibility for items stored in these areas. Approval may be subject to meeting certain conditions of use, and approval may later be reviewed and withdrawn.
- 2.8 We do not permit motorised vehicles in any part of a residential building that we manage, including its corridors, landings and balconies, entrance and exits etc. This includes but is not limited to motorbikes, scooters, and mobility scooters. It

excludes motorised wheelchairs, which may access an individual property through shared areas and be stored in an individual's home but still must not be left in a shared area covered by this policy. For more information see our mobility scooter policy.

- 2.9 We do not permit waste bags, bulk items or household waste to be left in the shared areas (as set out in 2.1) at any time. Residents must dispose of any household waste and recycling in the allocated bin areas, and of bulky household items (see bulk waste guidance on our website) in the area designated for bulk waste collection, no earlier than the day prior to the scheduled collection. Residents must not leave any item in non-designated shared areas, pending collection. Waste deposited in the open air, outside the designated area, at the wrong time, or if not eligible for collection, may be regarded as illegally-dumped waste, and leave the depositor liable to criminal or civil enforcement action.
- 2.10 Where a resident leaves an item in a shared area, we reserve the right to remove it immediately, and recharge for a contribution to the costs of removal, storage, return or disposal. For communal areas in specialist accommodation, where possible we will aim to give tenants notice to remove the item within a reasonable time. For more information see our Rechargeable Costs policy.

**Note:** Where we assess an item to be of lesser value than would meet a minimum cost<sup>1</sup> to remove and store we will arrange for its disposal. Where it is practical to do so we will try to minimise landfill by disposing of some items, included uncollected stored items, in accordance with our sustainability and social value aims. (See also our Abandoned goods policy).

- 2.11 Where a resident persistently leaves waste or other items in communal areas, despite warnings or reminders, we will view this as a conscious decision to compromise safety. Where it is not subject to any exception as laid out in this policy, we will take further action to remedy a breach of law and/or the terms of the tenancy or lease.

### 3. Monitoring, Consultation, and Communication

- 3.1 We created and reviewed this policy following discussion with residents and other stakeholders. The full implementation followed a successful pilot where we<sup>2</sup> engaged with residents in different types of buildings, and we incorporated learning points from the pilot into the policy. We further consulted with resident representatives in July 2021 when reviewing the policy and this feedback has led to more clarification on some points and a stronger emphasis on the management of waste.
- 3.2 We will monitor this policy by regularly checking the shared areas of our buildings. This will include routine visits by our staff or contractors, as well as specific inspection visits.

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<sup>1</sup> Currently set at £50 based on our reasonable judgement of an item's worth and resources to remove and store or dispose

<sup>2</sup> Refers in places to previous work conducted by Lewisham Homes who were wholly owned by Lewisham Council, and were managing most of the Council's Housing stock

- 3.3 We will communicate this policy to residents through our website, building signage, and other media where appropriate. We will also inform new tenants and leaseholders as part of the sign-up process. Residents will be regularly reminded of the policy as part of our fire safety messaging.
- 3.4 If residents wish to challenge action taken under this policy, they are advised to follow Lewisham Council Housing Services Complaints policy. We may likewise defend the challenge where we believe we have applied our policy reasonably, as the top priority of this policy is to preserve residents' safety.

## 4. Legislation and Regulation

- 4.1 This policy operates in line with existing legislation, regulation, and good practice, including but not limited to:
- Fire Safety Act 2021
  - Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
  - Building Safety Act 2023
  - The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
  - Public Liability Act 1936
  - Environmental Protection Act 1990
  - Housing Act 1985
  - Housing Act 2004 – introduced the Housing Health and Safety rating system (HHSRS)
- 4.2 This policy is also consistent with our tenancy and lease agreements. We may take action to enforce the terms of our tenancy and lease agreements. For example, our tenancy agreements contain the following:

### Communal areas

*" You must keep the communal areas around your home clean, free from obstruction and tidy at all times..... You must not store any items in communal areas, such as corridors and staircases, as this may breach health and safety regulations and cause delays in evacuation in case of a fire. Failure to observe this restriction may result in you being recharged for cleaning or removing of items."*

We have several different leases, including for shared owners. The following is provided as an example of a term contained in our standard lease for purpose-built blocks of flats:

### Fire Precautions

*" At all times during the term to comply at the expense of the Lessee with all the requirements of any legislation relating to the prevention or extinction of fires and the provision of means of escape from the Demised Premises in the case of fire and where the means of escape is through the Building or any adjoining Flat/Maisonette not to obstruct or interfere with such means of escape"*

### 5. Equality, diversity, and inclusion

- 5.1 An Equality Analysis Assessment (EAA) was carried out as part of the policy update process.
- 5.2 The extension of this policy to include communal areas in independent living schemes is intended to enhance fire safety and reduce risks associated with blocked exits. This change will particularly benefit older residents, disabled people, and those with health conditions that may affect mobility. We recognise that this may have a negative impact on individuals who exhibit hoarding behaviours, potentially increasing anxiety or resistance. To mitigate this, we will work closely with those individuals to provide support and ensure that any changes are implemented sensitively and collaboratively.
- 5.4 The policy will be regularly communicated in a variety of ways to ensure that all residents are made aware of the key messages and what is required of them. This includes clear signage.

### 6. Communication and consultation

Related documents include but are not limited to:

- Fire safety strategy
- Fire safety policy
- Alterations and Improvements policy
- Mobility scooter policy
- Rechargeable costs policy
- Abandoned goods policy

### 7. Reviewing this policy

Amendments to this policy not reflecting a major change of policy may be made by the Executive Director for Housing in consultation with the Director of Law and Corporate Governance. Such changes will be reported to Members annually.

<b>Replaces:</b> Clear Corridors Policy (January 2024) <i>Minor amendments to extend the policy's scope to include communal areas in independent living schemes. (v 1.1)</i>	
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<b>Policy owner:</b> Director of Housing Resident Engagement and Services	