

PROCEDURE	SUBJECT: Common Area Inspections	
DATE ISSUED:		REVIEW DATE: 12 months
ISSUED BY: Neighbourhood Housing		
FURTHER INFORMATION AVAILABLE FROM: Neighbourhood Housing Team Leaders		
PORTFOLIO HOLDER VISION Message from Cllr Bremner We recognise the important role communal spaces can play in having a positive impact on tenants and leaseholders well-being and quality of life. We want to encourage sensible use of communal spaces wherever possible, but we also have a duty to ensure the safety of all residents. Incidents such as the fire at Markham Tower really highlight the importance of keeping communal areas clear from hazards to ensure that everyone can get out of the building safely. We have worked with Norfolk Fire Service, tenants, housing officers, and councillors to come up with the following guidance, which has been designed to keep you safe, allow the Fire Brigade access in the event of an emergency, whilst also (where possible) giving you the freedom to make best use of the space available and create a pleasant external environment in which to live. We hope you can appreciate the need for this procedure and find this leaflet useful. Housing officers are happy to meet in person with any residents who would like to discuss the need for this procedure in more detail, and we have put in a system of reviewing cases.		
PURPOSE OF PROCEDURE The purpose of carrying out communal area inspections is to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • manage fire risk based on advice from the fire service and national best practice within the guidelines set out to keep communal areas clear of items to reduce the risk in case of fire, trips, slips and falls • ensure the safe access of all tenants, leaseholders, visitors, contractors and staff to our properties • take into consideration tenants and leaseholders desire to create a homely environment • promote the procedure to our tenants and leaseholders 		

We will aim to

- prevent the risk of injury or loss of life
- prevent the risk to property and loss of financial asset
- prevent the risk of loss of home and provision of emergency accommodation
- prevent the risk of litigation claims through a formal system of recording our inspections and actions
- identify repairs and trip hazards
- carry out routine maintenance inspections

Requirement of the council

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 requires Norwich City Council to carry out a risk assessment, part of which focuses on escape routes and therefore includes communal areas. A duty is placed on the landlord to carry out a fire risk assessment and take specific action to minimise the risk of fire in the common parts.

As a Council we must take reasonable steps to reduce the risk from fire and make sure people can safely escape if there is a fire.

Any equality and diversity impact?	Equitable delivery of service. Consider needs on all 7 strands re 1. race, 2. gender, 3. disability, 4. religion/belief, 5. sexual orientation and 6. age, 7. transgender Test of relevance, screening, Full diversity impact assessment required? If yes attach TOR, initial screening or assessment			
Any Housing / Corporate implications?	<i>e.g. Contribution to / conflict with corporate aims / targets</i>			
Duty to involve	Tenants / leaseholders / residents. <i>If yes, state outline details who, what, where, how</i> We have a statutory duty to consult with our tenants – the procedure will be taken to the tenant involvement panel for consultation and feedback.	Yes		
<u>Consultation - Section 105 of housing act 1985.doc</u>	tenants / leaseholders / stakeholders <i>If yes, state outline details who, what, where, how</i>			No
Impact in relation to	Equitable delivery of service? If yes include in an E & D test of relevance,			No – test of relevance

statutory code of practice on racial equality in housing	screening or DIA			carried out
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1. Introduction

The communal areas (including all exit routes) are owned by and are the responsibility of Norwich City Council.

As a council we have a responsibility to maintain the communal areas to a reasonable standard, to consult with and work with our tenants and leaseholders to achieve this aim, being mindful of their wishes to create a pleasant environment in which to live.

We have a duty to minimise the risk of fire in communal areas and to ensure that escape routes are not obstructed. Stairways/steps, corridors and all exit routes to be kept clear of obstructions, trip hazards and combustible materials. As part of this duty, housing officers will carry out a programme of regular inspections to all the communal areas to ensure compliance.

We will also carry out routine inspections for maintenance and checks on the structure of our buildings; therefore areas need to be clear in order to complete the maintenance inspections and carry out cleaning.

2. The Council's tenancy conditions state the following:

9 Communal areas

9.1 We will maintain the communal areas to a standard necessary for health and safety only. But we will only deal with a hazard or danger if we have notice of it. It is your responsibility, jointly with other occupiers using the communal areas, to keep them clean and tidy.

9.2 You must not do anything that is detrimental to other people's enjoyment of the communal areas. It is not possible to list all such activities, but common examples are:

- fly tipping*
- leaving things there that obstruct access or are otherwise a hazard or danger*
- carrying out car repairs (apart from occasional routine maintenance of your own vehicle outside)*
- graffiti*

3. Extracts from the Lessee covenants with the Council:

- a) *....not to do or permit or suffer to be done in or upon the Property or the Estate any illegal or immoral act or anything which may be or become a nuisance or annoyance or cause damage to the Council or the owners or occupiers of the*

other flats on the Estate and any neighbouring premises and not to place or deposit or permit suffer or allow the placing or depositing of any petrol or dangerous items or substances on or in the Property or the Building or the Estate

b)not to obstruct any parts of the Building or the Estate or deposit any dust rubbish or litter thereon

4. Purpose of communal area inspections

An inspection will take account of the following

- Immediate fire risks
- Fly tipping
- Storage of personal belongings in communal areas
- Health and safety – trip hazards, slips and repairs
- Consideration of site specific risks, subject to the design of the communal area
- Any maintenance / repairs required
- A graded inspection regime (see below)

5. The grading regime

The grading regime is defined as follows

- High risk enclosed communal areas - any flats/maisonettes above 3 floors.
- B. Medium risk - any flats/maisonettes up to and including 3 floors plus any open walkway area above 3 floors
- C. Low Risk - external (open) communal areas
- D. No risk.

NB. All stairwells/steps, whether in enclosed or open areas must be kept clear.

Grade A - High risk areas e.g. Tower blocks

A “clear corridor” approach is used in enclosed communal areas, corridors and all stairwells/steps above 3 floors. Under our obligations to manage these areas, no items at all are to be kept in the communal areas, corridors or stairwells/stairs.

Grade B - Medium risk areas e.g. Blocks such as Hooker Road (Heartsease) / Bullard Road / Russett Grove

A carefully managed approach is used.

Approved items that are permitted:

- 1 x regular sized fire proofed rubber back mat
- In single width corridors/accesses to homes - 1 small ceramic item up to 0.3048 metres square (1 foot square) maximum size (no plastic or silk flowers, no plastic

flower pots/items) to be at floor level, within close proximity to the flats front door area and must not hinder access

- In double width/larger communal areas a maximum of 3 plant pots (ceramic only) each up to 0.3048 metres square (1 foot square) maximum size (no plastic or silk flowers; no plastic flower pots/items) to be at floor level and must not hinder access.
- On each window sill – 1 small non-flammable item may be placed (this is at the tenants/leaseholder risk).
- For ground floor level homes only, flower planters may be attached to railings. These must be well secured, not cause damage to the railings or surrounding area, will be required to be removed on request for inspection/maintenance, be of no risk to the public and at the liability of the owner.
- For ground floor level homes only, where the access is to a single front door and is in an open area, a low level non lockable gate may be fitted. The gate must be of good quality, well installed and not cause damage to the fabric of the building. The gate will be required to be removed upon request for inspection/maintenance, be of no risk to the public and at the liability of the owner

Grade C low risk areas

For open communal areas a managed approach is used.

Open areas include the pathways and grassed areas that are leading up to a communal block, as well as the blocks that do not share a communal front entrance.

When conducting inspections of open areas we will take into account

- Floor level
- Proximity to the building and other structures
- Degree of enclosure (walls/ ceiling etc.)

Within these three general guidelines and at the discretion of the council, tenants and leaseholders will be allowed (in the communal area)

- 1 x regular sized fire proofed rubber back mat.
- A small number of pots/ornaments which are within close proximity of the home and do not cause an obstruction.
- For ground floor level homes only, flower planters may be attached to railings. These must be well secured, not cause damage to the railings or surrounding area, will be required to be removed on request for inspection/maintenance, be of no risk to the public and at the liability of the owner.
- For ground floor level homes only, where the access is to a single front door and is in an open area a low level non lockable gate may be fitted. The gate must be of good quality, well installed and not cause damage to the fabric of the building.

The gate will be required to be removed upon request for inspection/maintenance, be of no risk to the public and at the liability of the owner

Where possible if there is space to create a shared garden space, we will work with tenants to enable this. After a sufficient risk assessment this might include items such as

- bicycles/ buggies/prams: all which must not cause obstruction
- small un-upholstered items of furniture
- small storage units
- children's play equipment

N.B. Pets cannot be kept on communal areas

6. Exemptions

The following items are **not** allowed to be kept in any communal area (including stairwells/ steps)

Examples of immediate fire risks - Any substance that could be readily ignited with a naked flame, concentrated sunlight or electrical heat source should be removed from communal areas. Examples being

- larger amounts of paper and cardboard
- containers of petrol, diesel, oil, methylated spirits, white spirit. etc
- motorcycles, mopeds and scooters, petrol lawnmowers
- petrol/diesel powered tools or generators
- gas bottles and canisters, aerosol containers

Examples of non-immediate fire risks

- rubbish, rubbish sacks or bins
- electrical charging facilities.
- Items for recycling, plastic recycling containers and recycling bins/bags;
- white goods
- plastic green houses

N.B. these lists are not exhaustive

7. Guidance notes for officers

Bulky items – open and enclosed areas

Tenants and leaseholders should make arrangements to remove bulky items in line with the tenancy conditions and chargeable bulky waste collection service.

Recharges

We will recharge for removal of items where possible, the prices to be in line with the bulky items/tenancy recharge procedure

Mobility scooters - open and enclosed areas

Follow the mobility scooter procedure

Inspections Action will be taken by any council officers when hazards are seen without waiting for a booked inspection to take place by a housing officer.

Vulnerable residents – Where there is **no immediate fire risk**, we will work with vulnerable persons to ensure where possible, relevant support is in place and agree a time frame for items to be removed.

Fly tipping can be defined as rubbish and or discarded items that are of no value in open and enclosed areas

Extension of home in enclosed areas can be defined as personal items. Where personal items have been placed in the communal area as an extension of the home we will work with the residents to explain fully our procedure and agree a time frame for the items to be removed (where there is **no immediate fire risk**)