

# Council Housing



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# Communal Areas Fire Safety Policy

For general needs and sheltered housing



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<b>Approved by</b>	<b>S. Lodge</b>

## 1 Introduction

Lancaster City Council Housing considers the safety of residents as extremely important and takes its moral and legal responsibilities very seriously.

Fire risk assessments undertaken for the Council have identified inappropriate storage of materials in communal areas as a significant risk. This guidance is designed to ensure that fire risks are maintained at acceptable levels whilst allowing residents to personalise the areas immediately outside their flats. In turn the aim of the policy is to also increase resident's knowledge of how to be fire aware and raise their sense of responsibility towards fire safety.

**Definition of a communal area:** *Any area that is not within the confines of the tenant's property. Such areas include corridors, stairways, meter cupboards, basements, external gardens & bin stores, bin chute rooms, entrances to the building, garages and parking areas.*

## 2 Policy Statement

### 2.1 Evacuation and Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (peeps)

A Fire Action Plan will be displayed on your communal area notice board, and initial advice will be given regarding what to do in the event of an emergency at the start of your tenancy. Residents are encouraged to regularly familiarize themselves with their escape routes, and if possible form a personal evacuation plan for themselves and their families should an emergency situation arise.

Our information leaflet titled '*Fire Safety in Flats*' and our '*Tenants Guide to Sheltered Housing*' also has lots of good advice for you to refer to and can help you form your own personal emergency evacuation plan. If you would like further assistance with putting together your own personal emergency evacuation plan please refer to the information in section 2.8.1 of this policy or alternatively speak to your Estate Manager, or Scheme Manager for sheltered housing residents, about your eligibility in arranging a home fire safety check.

#### **Sheltered Housing (Category 2)**

In sheltered housing blocks where all flats are under one roof with communal corridors, your Scheme Manager will provide you with a copy of the Fire Action Plan for your block of flats and will be able to provide further advice should you need it, including the '*Tenants Guide to Sheltered Housing*' leaflet.

Please note, residents must evacuate the building in accordance with their buildings Fire Action Plan.

## 2.2 Fire Risk Assessments

Fire risk assessments will be carried out by a competent person (normally external consultancy) for all flats and communal areas owned by the Council and are reviewed on either a periodic basis (between 3-4 years) or when changes have been made.

## 2.3 Fire Safety Improvement Plans

Improvement actions identified by the risk assessments will either be addressed individually or incorporated into our planned maintenance fire safety improvement plan, and actioned by the responsible persons. These may include such things as upgrading fire doors to flats or installing emergency lighting or alarm systems within the communal area.

## 2.4 General Needs Communal Blocks

To enable the consistent management of all our communal areas, the Council will adopt a managed use approach, in so much as no personal possessions or unwanted goods will be permitted within communal areas or on escape routes. However, the Council may allow managed use items to be permitted within the communal areas, for which residents must request permission from your estate manager.

For the sake of confusion, the items that are definitely **not permitted** in any communal areas are on the following list.

### **Items not permitted in Communal Areas (see communal areas definition):**

- Flammable liquids and gases, including equipment containing flammable liquids or gases; examples include:-
  - Patio heaters or Barbeques
  - Paints or solvent based materials
  - Gas heaters or pressurized cylinders
  - Motorcycles / mopeds
  - Petrol driven gardening equipment
  - Portable generators

- Mobility scooters / wheelchairs /walking frames
- Any recycling, waste or wheelie bins (to be stored in designated external areas only)
- Clothes, Shoes, Boots or wellingtons
- Any electrical equipment
- Any leisure activity equipment
- Washing lines / maidens / gardening equipment
- Festive decorations or trees
- Any items of furniture (tables, chairs, cupboards etc.)
- Curtains / net curtains or any type of blinds for windows (communal areas only)
- Posters, pictures or any other wall coverings
- Door mats, carpets or runners
- Any other items identified as either a fire hazard or an obstruction to an escape route.

## 2.5 Managed use items and stairways

No items are permitted to be stored in stairways or landings, as this could block somebody's escape route in the event of a fire.

Items that may be placed in communal areas with written consent from the Council are: -

- Bicycles (not including electric). In some communal areas bike racks/hangers have been made available and tenants will be expected to use these or else bikes may be removed.
- Prams or pushchairs
- Small plant pots / planters, provided that;
  - They are small and do not pose a general obstruction
  - They are kept relatively close to a resident's front door
  - They do not reduce the width of any corridors to below 1050mm.
  - They do not hold artificial plants
  - They have a plant suitably sized saucer underneath them to retain water and do not create a slip hazard when watered.

## 2.6 Communal Area Inspections

As part of our commitment to fire safety within our communal areas, the Council will ensure that all communal areas are inspected on a regular basis by the Compliance Officer. Any issues identified during the Compliance

Officer's inspection will be recorded and actioned within reasonable time scales, and then monitored.

## 2.7 Prevention

Wherever possible, the Council will aim to prevent fire safety issues by educating residents from the beginning of their tenancies, and ensuring that information, support, and advice is readily available.

2.7.1 All contact with our residents will be used to educate and advise of the potential fire risks within our communal areas. The following is not an exhaustive list, but will form the basis of personal communication between the Council and our Residents.

### 2.7.2 Pre sign-up risk assessment

#### **General Needs Housing:**

Where a property sits within a communal block, the Estate Manager will advise new residents about the Communal Area Fire Safety Policy and explain to residents their responsibilities in adhering to the policy. Estate Managers must also explain that their building has a Fire Action Plan, a copy of which can be found in the communal area.

#### **Sheltered Housing:**

For new residents within a sheltered housing scheme, the Scheme Manager will provide advice about the fire alarm system within the block, and how the fire evacuation procedure works.

## 2.8 Sign Up

All new residents to the Council who have been housed in a communal building will receive the Council's *Living Safely (Fire Safety in Flats)* document and will be briefed on fire safety measures specific to their new home at sign up.

### 2.8.1 Free Home Fire Safety Check

Residents are advised that Lancashire Fire Service offer a free home fire safety check if tenants are deemed high risk. For tenants not deemed high risk Lancashire Fire Service offer tailored fire safety information relating to their individual needs, either electronically or through the post. For further information you can go online at the following web address:

<http://www.lancsfirerescue.org.uk/>

## 2.9 Alterations to Property Doors

Residents are **not** permitted to make changes to, add or remove items on their flat front door or frame. Residents may be recharged if necessary for repairs or replacement doors and frames if they undertake unauthorized alterations to them and reduce the integrity and fire safety performance of their door and frame. Fire doors will be regularly inspected by the Council's communal area Compliance Officer and alterations will be noted and actioned accordingly.

2.9.1 Leaseholders who replace their front door with a door that is below 30 mins fire resisting performance, will be advised to change it pending an inspection by Lancashire Fire and Rescue. Leaseholders who continually ignore the Council's fire safety advice will be subject to fire safety improvement notices issued by Lancashire Fire and Rescue Fire Safety Enforcement Officers.

### 2.9.2 Policy Communication

The Council's approach is to ensure that residents understand the policy and it is applied in a fair and consistent manner to all. Residents will be provided with literature on the Council's policy along with other fire safety information. All information will be also available from the Council's website.

### 2.9.3 Policy Enforcement

The Council is aware that there will be some residents who will choose to disregard this policy. In such circumstances every effort will be made to liaise with these residents to achieve an agreeable outcome before further action is taken to enforce this policy within the communal areas.

#### 2.9.4 Good Practice

The Council has based its policy on the 'Local Government Group' Fire Safety in purpose-built blocks of flats, which is supported by the Chartered Institute of Housing, National Housing Federation, Chief Fire Officers Association, Chartered Institute of Environmental Health and the Electrical Safety Council, Published July 2011.

### 3 Equality and Diversity Implications

The Council will strive to make early contact with our residents when a fire safety issue arises, and where possible will talk it through with them to promote a firm but fair approach. Where there are specific needs to the tenancy, then the Council will seek to work with support agencies and/or families to resolve any issues. Where there are disability issues, then the Council will work with individuals and/or families to resolve the safety issues first and foremost, with the view to find a permanent solution which satisfies both parties. All documents will also be made available to tenants in other languages/formats on request.

### 4 Responsibility

#### Responsible Persons

**Chief Officer for Health and Housing Services** – Acting as the deputy to the Chief Executive in ensuring full compliance, in accordance with the Communal Area Fire Safety Policy and general fire safety policies.

**Principal Housing Manager** – Assisting the Chief Officer of Health and Housing with compliance, and ensuring correct implementation of the fire safety policies and monitoring of the fire safety management system.

**Repairs and Maintenance Manager** - To implement an effective fire safety management system in accordance with Lancaster City Councils fire safety policies.

**Contracts Maintenance Officer** – Arrange and appoint competent contractors and consultants for fire risk assessments and the repair and maintenance of fire safety equipment. Arrange and manage contracts for planned fire safety works. Liaise with Fire Brigade and other authorities on fire safety matters. Implement suitable Fire Action Plans for all communal areas.



**Communal Area Compliance Officer** – Carry out periodic fire safety checks on all communal areas. Ensure that all fire safety devices and equipment is in place and is fully operational, carry out statutory tests within the communal areas and record information in the fire safety log book. Report faults with fire safety equipment to the Contracts Maintenance officer. Report cases of non-compliance in accordance with Lancaster City Councils Fire safety policies to Council Housing Management.

**Estate Managers/Scheme Managers** – Advise new tenants of the communal areas fire safety policy and its contents, the buildings Fire Action Plan, issue copies of fire safety policy and other fire safety information to new tenants, give advice on evacuation routes and types of fire safety equipment installed relevant to their new home. Provide details on where to find sources of further information on personal fire safety, personal emergency evacuation plans, and how to get assistance with these.

Lancaster City Council have formally adopted this Communal Areas Fire Safety Policy, and accepts responsibility for its implementation and for monitoring its effectiveness.

The Chief Officer for Health and Housing will have overall responsibility for the effective implementation of this policy.

## **5 Monitoring and Review**

This policy will be developed and reviewed every 3 years.

## **6 Associated Documents**

Adaptation Policy  
Equality and Diversity Policy  
Rechargeable Repairs Policy  
Living Safely (Fire Safety in flats)  
Communal Areas Fire Safety Policy  
Tenants Guide to Sheltered Housing  
Fire Action Plan  
Health and Housing services (Council Housing) Fire Safety Policy

### **Legislation:**

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005  
The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988 (as amended)  
The Housing Act 2004  
Equality Act 2010

# Contact Information

## Health and Housing Services Council Housing

**Postal Address:**

PO Box 4, Town Hall, Dalton Sq., Lancaster. LA1 1QR

**Telephone:**

01524 582929

**E-mail:**

[councilhousing@lancaster.gov.uk](mailto:councilhousing@lancaster.gov.uk)

**Website:**

[www.lancaster.gov.uk](http://www.lancaster.gov.uk)

Office hours are 9.00 am to 5.00 pm Monday to Friday (10.00 am to 5.00 pm Wednesdays)

When the office is closed, in an emergency ring the council's Emergency Call Centre which is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The number to call is: 01524 67099

Calls may be recorded to help improve our standard of service and accuracy of information.



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