

Committee(s)	Dated:
Housing Management and Almshouses Sub-Committee	27/11/2017
Subject: Fire Safety Protocol – Communal Areas in Residential Blocks	Public
Report of: Director of Community and Children’s Services	For Decision
Report author: Amy Carter	

Summary

The report asks Members to approve a revised protocol relating to fire safety on our estates. In particular, it relates to the placing of plants, outdoor furniture and other items on landings and communal areas.

This protocol seeks to balance our responsibility as a landlord to keep our estates as safe as possible, with our wish for residents to live in a welcoming and homely environment.

Recommendation

Members are asked to endorse the protocol, for immediate adoption and implementation.

Main Report

Background

1. Many of the flats on the City’s housing estates have no garden and very limited outdoor space. For this reason, some residents have placed containers of plants outside their properties and on communal areas.
2. The use of communal areas in this manner is not problematic, provided that the items do not impede access and do not pose a fire risk. However, there are occasions when the quantity and type of items do exceed what is safe and reasonable.
3. The protocol was initially produced as a result of a London Fire Brigade inspection at one estate, where the inspecting officer expressed serious concern about the quantity of plant pots, garden furniture and other items in a communal area.
4. The protocol was first approved by the Housing Management and Almshouses Sub-Committee in September 2016.

Current Position

5. The protocol has been in use for over a year with great success.
6. Estate Teams monitor walkways and communal areas regularly on all estates, and residents are asked to remove items in accordance with the protocol.
7. The majority of residents have readily complied with the requirements as they understand and appreciate that the fire risks posed by some items, and/or access being restricted cannot be tolerated.
8. We have received one formal complaint, which was initially said to be about the request to remove plants, however, following investigation it was determined that the items that were requested to be removed were assorted tools, equipment and miscellaneous items which were posing a fire risk.
9. There is an ongoing situation on one estate which is now being resolved via a court process.

Consultation on the Protocol

10. The protocol has been reviewed in liaison with the London Fire Brigade, the City's Fire Safety Advisor and the Barbican & Property Services Division.
11. This protocol is required on health and safety grounds, and there is limited scope to adapt the content in response to resident's views, as such, it is not felt that resident consultation is appropriate.

Content of the Protocol

12. The protocol allows residents to place a certain amount of plants in communal areas, thus recognising that this is important to some residents, and can enhance the appearance of an estate. However, it restricts the depth, height and location of any plant displays to quantities as advised by the Fire Safety Officer.
13. The protocol sets out a procedure whereby managers can remove items immediately if the threat they pose is high risk, or after giving 7 days written notice for lower risk items.
14. The protocol does allow exceptions to be made by the Estate Manager, in consultation with the Fire Safety Advisor. However, permission for such exceptions must be obtained in writing.

Changes to the Protocol

15. The changes to the 2016 version of the protocol are minor. A number of sections have been re-worded for clarity, including Point 5 on access and Point 6 relating to doors.
16. A new section 'Private Balconies' has been included, as it was not felt the requirements were explicit enough in the previous version.
17. A new section on 'Drying Laundry' has also been included, in recognition that the City must strike a balance between requiring residents to minimise condensation

in their homes as this is a contributory factor to damp and mould cases, while simultaneously recognising that if laundry 'airers' are placed outside, they can proffer a source of fuel for a fire or block access/escape routes.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

18. The Comptroller was consulted about this protocol.

Conclusion

19. The further approval and continued implementation of this protocol will allow residents to display plants in communal areas to a reasonable level, but will also give managers the authority they need to address any problems which arise and thus prevent further risks to the safety of all residents.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Fire Safety Protocol

Appendix 2: Equality Analysis

Amy Carter

Projects & Improvements Manager Housing & Neighbourhoods

T: 020 7332 1653

E: Amy.Carter@cityoflondon.gov.uk