



## **City of London Housing Service**

### **Fire Safety Protocol Communal Areas in Residential Buildings**

<b>Approved by</b>	<b>Housing Management &amp; Almshouses Sub-Committee</b>
<b>Date</b>	
<b>Review Date</b>	<i>**2 years from approval date</i>

## **1. Equal Opportunities**

The City of London Corporation operates an Equality & Diversity policy and this applies to all aspects of its services. We will ensure that no resident or service user is treated less favourably on the grounds of age, race, religion or belief, disability, sex, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity, marriage or civil partnership status. This protocol and all related information can be made available in different formats and languages on request.

## **2. Aims**

We are committed to providing safe homes for our residents.

The aims of this protocol are:

- To allow the City of London Corporation to carry out its landlord obligations in the communal areas of our housing estates.
- To limit the 'allowable items' in communal areas in order to reduce both the risk and severity of fires, by controlling combustible materials.
- To remove the risk of items causing an obstruction to access or exit routes in the event of an emergency.
- To inform residents what steps will be taken where an item is inappropriately located or stored.
- To continue to allow residents to make their communal areas welcoming and to encourage a sense of pride in their homes while maintaining a safe environment.

## **3. Legislative and regulatory framework**

- The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire Safety) Regulations 1988 (as amended in 1989, 1993 and 2010)
- Building Regulations 2010
- Housing Act 2004
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO)

There is some overlap between the Housing Act and the FSO. The Housing Act applies to the common parts and the flats themselves; common parts also fall within the scope of the FSO.

This protocol has been developed with regard to the London Fire Brigade's general good practice and where relevant, specific advice provided on the occasion of visits to our estates.

## **4. Scope of the protocol**

The protocol applies to the City of London Housing Service's owned and managed residential properties on 13 social housing estates.

## **5. Access**

All access routes including stairs, hallways, walkways and pathways in communal areas are to be kept clear at all times. The minimum width of an access route is 900mm which must be kept clear at all times.

Where an access route is physically wider than 900mm, a clear width of 1200mm wide is required to be kept clear at all times, to enable access for persons using wheelchairs, mobility scooters or equivalent.

## **6. Doors**

Residents must not alter any door without permission; this includes but is not limited to, replacing the door or adding further security measures such as metal gates or other additional ironmongery.

## **7. Alterations to Communal Areas**

Residents may not make alterations to communal areas; this includes but is not limited to actions such as propping doors open or installing items such as fencing.

## **8. Alterations to Shared Access Routes**

The design of some properties incorporates an emergency exit route, for example across the balconies or through a wooden panel between properties. Residents must ensure these routes are maintained, they must be kept free from obstruction and additional security measures such as locks must not be added onto them.

## **9. Items in Communal Areas**

The City reserves the right to remove any items stored, left or disposed of in the communal areas without limitation. In particular items that may cause a fire risk or those blocking access or exit routes will be removed.

The list below sets out some common items that may be affected by this protocol, however, it is not exhaustive.

### **i. Highly Flammable Items**

Highly flammable items including, but not limited to candles, tea lights, religious candles, lanterns, wick lights 'shrines' or equivalent are not permitted in communal areas.

We urge caution with the use of items such as candles within residents' homes. For example, residents must ensure candles are not placed close to flammable items and ensure they are fully extinguished before they go to sleep. Please see our [Fire Safety Leaflet](#).

### **ii. Plants and Trees**

The minimum access requirements, as outlined at Point 5, must be maintained at all times.

Plants may be located adjacent to the external wall of a resident's property, if they are placed on suitable surface. The plants and containers they are stored in must not extend to a depth greater than 450mm. Foliage from plants must extend no higher than 1200mm. Trellises or climbing plants above the height of 1200mm are not permitted.

Trees in planters are not to exceed a height of 2100mm with a diameter of no more than 600mm. Planters for trees must be of a diameter of no more than 400mm.

Hanging baskets brackets are to project no further than 300mm and the bracket must have no section lower than 1975mm from the floor. The basket may hang lower.

Planters on railings must be securely affixed and not hang externally over railing.

No flower pots or equivalent are to be placed on window sills or ledges.

The City of London reserves the right, after undertaking a risk assessment, to allow limited planters in demarcated areas designated by City of London staff. These will not extend to a depth of more than 450mm.

### **iii. Furniture**

Depending on layout of an area, including ensuring the minimum access requirements, as outlined at Point 5, are maintained at all times, some furniture may be used in the communal areas. However it must be stored away within the residents' property when not in use.

Residents with individual balconies may leave small quantities of patio or garden furniture outside. If any soft furnishings are used, they must comply with The Furniture and Furnishings (Fire Safety) Regulations 1988 (as amended in 1989, 1993 and 2010) which set levels of fire resistance for domestic upholstered furniture, furnishings and other products containing upholstery.

### **iv. Private Balconies**

Furniture or plants complying with the terms outlined at Points ii. and iii. may be placed on private balconies.

Other items may be placed on private balconies as long as they do not impact upon fire safety in any way. For example, a bicycle may be placed on a private balcony.

No items that could impact upon fire safety in any way are to be stored on private balconies.

### **iv. Mobility Scooters, Prams, Buggies and Bicycles**

All devices must be stored within the resident's home or placed in designated sheds or garages where these are available and suitable for this use.

If a resident is unable to store their device in their home or a shed or garage is not available, they must approach their Estate Manager. If an alternative arrangement is agreed, this will be confirmed in writing to the resident.

If any item is permitted to be stored within the communal area, the detail of the written permission will include how the item must be stored; for example, not in the escape routes from the premises, nor may the item limit or block access through the communal access routes.

If a device is required to be charged whilst stored within a communal area, the charging location must also be agreed in writing, which allows power to be sourced from the resident's home via a safe method. For example, if the device must not block access routes while being charged, the power lead must not create a trip hazard and a Residual Current Device (RCD) must be used.

## **v. Doormats**

It is acceptable to place a single door mat outside each flat entrance door to assist people in protecting the inside of their property. The mat may only be placed directly in front of the door. Mats may not be placed at the top of stairs or cause a tripping hazard.

The mat must have a non-slip backing material, be in good condition and free from curling edges. A maximum size; the width of the door x 450mm (18in) depth (i.e. projecting into the communal area) is permitted. The placement of rugs, runners, carpet off cuts and carpet tiles within communal areas is not acceptable. Example below:



## **vi. Drying laundry**

We recognise that it is important to some residents to dry their laundry outside, as this can help to minimise the risk of condensation within their homes. However, laundry drying on communal or private balconies can pose a fire risk; for example, a cigarette dropped onto laundry may ignite it, alternatively if a laundry airer in a communal area fell over, it could block a fire escape.

The minimum access requirements in communal areas must be maintained at all times (see Access, Point 5). Therefore, if there is insufficient space within the communal area, it is not permissible to place laundry in a communal area at any point.

It is our policy that residents may only put laundry out to dry when they are at home. This means they would be able to rectify the situation should a fire risk be caused by their laundry.

## **10. Barbeques**

Barbeques are not permitted on balconies – whether private or communal, or in spaces such as walkways within residential buildings.

Events may be held which include barbeques in communal areas such as gardens or podiums, where appropriate permissions from the Estate Team, risk assessments and insurance provisions are in place.

### **11. Smoking in Communal Areas**

It is illegal to smoke in all public enclosed or substantially enclosed areas. On estates this legislation extends to communal areas such as stairs, hallways, walkways, balconies, building under-crofts, car parks and car park areas.

### **12. Risk Assessments**

Fire Risk Assessments or a review of existing assessments are carried out in every block, every year. Where there is a relevant change during the year, a further Fire Risk Assessment or review will be carried out.

### **13. Enforcement Action**

Where a breach of this protocol is noted, and the threat posed is immediate and/or it is high risk, the Estate Team will immediately remedy the breach.

Where a breach of this protocol is noted, and the threat posed is not immediate and/or it is medium to low risk, the Estate Team will write to the resident (where known), informing them of the breach, and giving the resident 7 days to remedy the situation. If an item is required to be removed to remedy a breach, a notice may also be placed on the item.

If the resident has not taken the appropriate action after 7 days, the Estate Team will remedy the breach.

If remedying a breach involves removing any item, the Estate Team will store it elsewhere if it is safe to do so, or dispose of it where necessary. The resident, if known, will be informed regarding the action that has been taken and how they may retrieve their possessions.

If the Estate Team cannot remedy the breach, legal action will be undertaken in accordance with the applicable tenancy agreement or lease.

### **14. Policy Exceptions**

If a resident requests an exception to this protocol, the Estate Manager will consider the request. They may consult with others, for example the City's Fire Safety Advisor, an Area Manager or the Head of Estates. They may also commission or carry out an additional Risk Assessment, or seek information from the London Fire Brigade. The decision will then be confirmed in writing.

### **15. Monitoring the protocol**

Adherence with this protocol will be monitored by each Estate Manager and enforcement action taken as necessary.