



**Blackpool Coastal  
Housing**

# **Management of Communal Areas Procedure**

April 2025

INSPIRING PEOPLE TO BUILD **BETTER COMMUNITIES**

## Document Information

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<b>Version/Issue Number</b>	1.1	
<b>Document Status</b>	Final	
<b>Effective From Date</b>	14 <sup>th</sup> March 2019	
<b>Scope of Document</b>	It details how BCH will deal with items stored in the communal blocks	
<b>Objective</b>	To stop customers storing items in the internal communal blocks	
<b>Who needs to know?</b>	Staff and customers	
<b>Documentation</b>		
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## Amendment Record

<b>Date</b>	<b>Issue No.</b>	<b>Section/Page</b>	<b>Details of Change</b>	<b>Authorised By:</b>
05.02.2021	1.1		Policy rebranded and updated	Paul Dillon
30.11.2023	1.2	All	General update of the document	Paul Dillon
12.02.2024	1.3	Slips, trips & falls	Additional of slips, trips and falls section	Paul Dillon
17.04.2025	1.4	All	General update of the document	Paul Dillon

## Amendment Notes

- Documents at draft status are to use letter designations to denote issue status: a, b, c etc.
- Documents at full issue status are to use number designations to denote issue status after full revision: 1.0, 2.0, 3.0, etc.
- For an amendment to a full issue document you are to use number designation to denote issue status: 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, etc.
- On full issue the draft amendment record should be deleted from the above table.
- Notification of the amendment must be sent to the person maintaining the Central Register.

## 1.0 Zero Tolerance Policy on Storage of Items in Communal Areas

1.1 This document sets out Blackpool Coastal Housing's (BCH) approach to manage fire safety risks in communal area, specifically in terms of housekeeping standards.

1.2 The purpose of the procedure is to ensure a clear, consistent approach to prevent the storage of items within communal areas to reduce risks, increase fire safety and improve the overall appearance of the internal communal areas of BCH owned flats.

1.3 The overall aims of this policy are:

- To ensure the safety of residents living in BCH blocks of flats and their visitors;
- To reduce un-necessary risks and comply with our duties under primary legislation including fire safety laws; and
- To ensure that BCH meets its statutory and regulatory responsibilities.

1.4 For the purpose of this policy, a communal area is defined as those parts of a block of flats including: communal hallways/walkways, shared staircases, balconies, bin and storage areas, access paths, communal gardens and drying areas.

## 2.0 Background

2.1. The safety of residents living in flats with communal areas is of the utmost importance to BCH. Residents using communal areas to keep belongings can present serious hazards, particularly in the event of a fire. Items such as mobility scooters, plant pots, prams, bikes, shopping trolleys or bags of rubbish are a real fire hazard. If there is a fire they cannot be seen in thick smoke causing residents to easily trip or fall over them. If items are blocking fire escapes, it will take longer for residents to exit the building which can lead to people being injured or even killed. Items left within internal communal areas can also have a detrimental effect on the overall appearance of the blocks.

2.2 A 'Zero Tolerance' approach, is one where residents are not permitted to use the common parts to store or dispose of any belongings, rubbish or personal items. It ensures these areas are free from combustible materials and obstructions.

2.3 Communal areas do not belong to any resident, either tenant or leaseholder, including the area immediately outside the front door; and residents do not have a right to store or leave anything in the communal area of the building.

2.4 Communal areas must be kept clear and free from obstruction at all times. Fire doors to escape routes must not be wedged or propped open.

2.5 BCH reserves the right to remove any item left in a communal area including, but not exclusively:- pushchairs, prams or buggies, rubbish bags, wheeled bins, lockers and cabinets, washing machines, tumble dryers and other goods awaiting disposal, unwanted bedding and mattresses, children's toys and play equipment, shopping trolleys, loose carpets and door mats, plant pots, unwanted mail or newspapers.

2.6 Bicycles, mopeds and motorbikes must not be stored in communal areas as they could hamper evacuation in the event of a fire. Servicing or cleaning of these items should not take place in the communal areas.

2.7 Mobility scooters and e-vehicles (bikes and scooters) cannot be stored and charged in communal areas. If they are being kept in residents' home, escape routes should not be blocked and easily accessed. In some areas BCH have developed scooter sheds that can be rented out.

It is recognised that the use of mobility scooters can enhance the quality of life for many older or less mobile residents, who otherwise maybe limited in their ability to access external facilities in the wider community. However, for some people, the use of mobility scooters is a lifestyle choice and their use is not critical to their independence.

With the increased use of mobility scooters and e-vehicles, comes fire safety concerns associated with their storage and charging. The design of many of our properties, does not always lend itself to the safe storage and charging of these vehicles. The lack of space and the layout of corridors, stairways in communal areas mean that individuals will often leave scooters adjacent to their front doors on protected escape routes or within protected stairways. This approach is in breach of this policy.

When a mobility scooter or e-vehicle is involved in fire, the risk of harm is significant. In residential buildings, these fires can pose a life safety risk to tenants, employees, firefighters and other relevant persons.

Mobility scooters and e-vehicles involved in a fire can release large volumes of smoke and generate significant heat outputs. If they are stored in escape routes and are involved in a fire, there is a potential that escape routes will become impassable and residents could be placed at significant risk in the event of a fire. Therefore appropriate measures must be considered within the building risk fire assessment to address the risks posed by the storage and charging of mobility scooters. Please refer to our Mobility Scooter Procedure for more details.

2.8 Bin store doors should be kept closed and locked. Large items of household waste such as bulky furniture must not be left in the bin store.

2.9 Individual wheelie bins should not be left in communal areas or under staircases. Where provided, wheelie bins should be stored away from the building or in designated bin storage areas.

2.10 Electrical meter cupboards must not be used for storage and must be kept locked.

2.11 Storage cupboards in communal areas must be kept locked and should not be used for storage of any kind.

2.12 BCH is committed to a prominent level of cleanliness and standard on its estates and will act appropriately to remove any items from communal areas to encourage responsible storage/disposal of items and discourage fly tipping and similar practices.

### 3.0 What your Tenancy Agreement says about communal areas.

3.1 BCH's Tenancy Agreement sets out the basic rules regarding keeping communal areas free from obstruction. They are as follows:

**Clause 6.11 You must not store bottled gas, petrol, paraffin or other dangerous inflammable or explosive substances in or at your property or in any communal or shared areas.**

**Clause 6.16. You must make sure that your property and any communal or shared areas remain clear and free from obstruction.**

### 4.0 Fire Doors

- 4.1 In general, fire doors within a block of flats fall into four categories, namely:
- flat entrance doors: these are particularly important because in blocks of flats, most fires occur within the flats themselves; the flat entrance door prevents the spread of fire and smoke into the common parts and ensures the safety of other residents
  - doors to stairways and lobbies keep the stairways and lobbies free from fire and smoke, so that they can safely be used by residents and others who might need to leave the building during a fire, and to assist firefighters during firefighting operations
  - doors that sub-divide corridors are to limit the spread of fire and smoke throughout, for example, a long corridor
  - doors to plant rooms and cupboards (for example containing electrical distribution equipment) and to service risers (shafts which allow the vertical passage of cables, pipes)
- 4.2 Doors to stairways and lobbies and doors within corridors are subject to greater wear and tear, and to greater potential for damage, than flat entrance doors, so they must be examined more regularly.
- 4.3 In some premises, corridor and lobby doors might be held open on magnetic door hold-open devices. For this to be the case, there would be a need for smoke detectors, activation of which would cause the door to close. Care should be taken when checking the self-closing device on these doors. Use the test button, where provided, to close the door, rather than pulling the door from its magnet.
- 4.4 The information given to customers should cover the importance of keeping doors closed, that doors and self-closing devices are not tampered with and that any faults or damage to doors should be raised immediately.

Customers will receive this information when they move into a multi-occupied residential building and then on an annual basis.

### 5.0 What action will we take if we find items being stored in the communal areas?

- 5.1 BCH will ensure that communal areas are used in the correct way for the benefit of residents, visitors, staff, and emergency services.

End users using hard copies of this document are responsible for ensuring that their copy is up to date.

BCH or its contractors will undertake regular inspections of communal facilities and carry out any corrective actions that may be required.

BCH reserve the right to make adaptations to the Policy on a case-by-case basis. This dynamic approach is key to ensuring that the Policy remains effective, and the most suitable action is taken to reduce the risk.

## 5.2 Enclosed Block

BCH will use a 'Zero Tolerance Approach' (as recognised in guidance) to communal areas within enclosed blocks to protect the health and safety of residents and other users of the buildings. This means that no items will be permitted to be left within our communal areas, to:

- Control fire hazards
- Reduce the likelihood of fire spread
- Keep exits, corridors and stairways clear for safe escape purposes
- Maintain communal areas for the safety and wellbeing of all residents, visitors, staff, contractors, and the emergency services
- Allow BCH to carry out their obligations for communal cleaning and effective property management and maintenance

No items will be permitted to be stored within the communal areas. This can include but is not limited to: -

- Mobility scooters
- E-bikes and scooters
- Pedal bikes
- Pictures
- Plants and flowers
- Carpets & door mats
- Children's toys and bikes
- Furniture including mattresses, cupboards, chairs, or sofa's

## 5.3 External Blocks (Deck Access)

BCH will use a 'managed approach' (as recognised in guidance) to communal areas to protect the health and safety of residents and other users of the buildings.

The key principles that support our 'managed policy' are about a 'common sense' approach based on the level of risk to a situation. This means that BCH will consider key health and safety principles when considering the most appropriate/practicable measure(s) to take to reduce the risk identified too as low as reasonably practicable.

This includes looking at the type of hazard identified and the likelihood of the risk occurring. As a result, the following items are permitted: -

- Plants and hanging baskets
- Number plaques
- Door mats

However, there are some key principles which must be followed by residents living in external blocks:

- Any items must not obstruct routes in such a way that prevents wheelchair user access. This means that a 1m width (or the existing corridor width, where the width is less than 1m) should be maintained at all times.
- Any items must not compromise either escape or fire-fighting activities or obstruct any fire-fighting equipment at any time.
- Any items should not cause damage to the existing building fabric.
- Any items must not disproportionately increase the fire risk.

## 6.0 Slips, trips, and falls

- 6.1 The majority of trips and falls are caused by obstructions in walkways and preventing these accidents is often simple. We have adopted a risk-based approach to manage the communal areas we are responsible for.
- 6.2 Walkways must be always kept clear to ensure they are safe for everyone to use. Please ensure you leave no trailing wires, no obstructions or household objects as detailed in the previous paragraphs.
- 6.3 We are looking at publishing information to share with our customers to raise awareness of these issues and to also encourage the reporting of them. If any lights are out, or you notice an uneven surface on a walkway in your building or estate please report it to our repairs team.
- 6.4 Our Neighbourhood Officers regularly complete estate walkabouts and will report and identified issues to our repairs department. Any larger scale works that are identified will be referred to our asset management team.
- 6.5 Our cleaning contractors also complete a block inspection to our 3 storey blocks each time they are cleaned. The inspection will identify and slip, trip and falls hazards along with any items that need to be removed.

## 7.0 Customer Obligations

- 7.1 Customers should familiarise themselves with the conditions of the tenancy agreement on communal areas and balconies.
- 7.2 Customers should follow the health and safety advice and guidance provided by BCH.
- 7.3 Customers are responsible for keeping communal areas clear and free from obstruction or flammable material, including but not limited to mobility scooters, mobility aids and large furniture.
- 7.4 Customers are responsible for removing all items and possessions from their property, including communal areas at the end of a tenancy.

## 8.0 Enforcement

- 8.1 Whilst BCH is committed to ensuring residents enjoy and feel positive about where they live, it is equally committed to keeping residents and visitors safe. BCH will work with residents to achieve this balance and will always welcome resident feedback and suggestions.
- 8.2 BCH will be proactive in taking action against individuals who risk the health and safety of themselves and other residents in communal areas.



- 8.3 Where BCH become aware of any non-flammable personal items in a communal area, Neighbourhood Officer's will aim to contact the owner of the items, informing them that we will remove them in 5 working days. Residents are required to move the items before they are removed from the area. A case will be opened on our in-house management system. BCH will take photographs of items that are to be stored or disposed of.
- 8.4 Communal areas are subject to routine inspections. Where flammable items are found in communal areas, these will be removed immediately under Section 41 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1982). There may be instances where items that are deemed hazardous may also be subject to immediate removal.
- 8.5 If the owner of the items fails with our request to remove the goods, we will serve a written legal notice under section 41 of the Housing Act 1982 Act. We will also act under the tenancy agreement.
- 8.6 BCH will store non-perishable items which in their considered opinion are of value in a dedicated storage space for 28 days, after which, any unrecovered property will be disposed of. Residents may be liable for the costs of removal and disposal of any non-permitted items found in communal areas.
- 8.7 BCH are not liable for loss or damage to any item if they have been left in a communal area. Additionally, if there is any damage to communal areas caused by the storage of these type of items, the costs of making good the damage may be recharged to the resident.
- 8.8 BCH takes a serious view on breaches of tenancy or lease agreements that pose a fire risk or health and safety risk to the household and others living within a block. If a resident refuse to remove items that are posing a risk following RBCH's verbal/written requests, Neighbourhood Officers may be required to take appropriate enforcement action to resolve this and may seek to recover the costs of any legal proceedings. Each case will be assessed on its own merits, and depending on the severity, an injunction or court order may be sought.
- 8.9 Customers can contact the Neighbourhood's Team on items that have been stored.
- Email – [asb@bch.co.uk](mailto:asb@bch.co.uk)
  - Phone – 01253 477900 (option 3)