



Policy title:	Fire Safety Management of Communal Areas Policy		
Scope:	Group-wide		
Policy owner:	Head of Neighbourhoods		
Approver:	Executive Director of Place		
Date:	November 2022	Review Due Date:	November 2025

1. PURPOSE

1.1 Aspire Housing makes it clear when it rents or sells a property what land the tenant or owner is responsible for. In properties such as flats, communal facilities are often present and the upkeep, cleanliness, safety, and sensible use are important for the safety and enjoyment of all residents that live in the surrounds. The policy provides a framework for how communal areas will be managed and what is expected from customers.

2. SCOPE OF POLICY

2.1 The Management of Communal Areas Policy sets out the approach that Aspire Housing takes to manage enclosed communal areas and the areas that immediately surround blocks of flats and group premises

2.2 The policy applies to both tenants of Aspire Housing and leaseholders and anyone that visits or lives with a tenant or leaseholder. The policy also applies to tenants in general housing properties as well as those within Enclosed Schemes.

2.3 For the purpose of the policy, a communal area includes;

- Communal/Shared entrances
- Communal landings
- Communal lounges
- Communal kitchen
- Communal bathroom
- Any shared stairwell, balcony, or access path
- Communal gardens

- Communal parking areas
- Bin stores
- Drying areas
- Any cupboard area or loft that is located within a communal area

3. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 To ensure the health and safety of customers, leaseholders, colleagues, and visitors when in a communal area.
- 3.2 To allow communal areas to be used in the best possible way for the benefit of all customers, leaseholders, colleagues, and visitors.
- 3.3 To explain what measures Aspire Housing can take to monitor or control communal areas.
- 3.4 To ensure that communal areas can be safely evacuated and accessed by emergency services in the event of an emergency.
- 3.5 To give clear advice to residents to minimise the risks of items causing an obstruction to access routes in the event of an emergency.
- 3.6 To allow for the cleaning/caretaking staff, where present, to carry out their job effectively, which in turn supports the upkeep of the communal areas.
- 3.7 To allow maintenance staff to safely and easily complete works to further ensure the safety and upkeep of the building.

4. CONTROL OF ENCLOSED COMMUNAL AREAS AND AREAS THAT IMMEDIATELY SURROUND

- 4.1 Aspire Housing is committed to ensuring that the health and safety of everyone that lives in, works in or visits any property. As a landlord, Aspire Housing has a responsibility to ensure internal/enclosed communal areas are kept clear and accessible so that residents can exit the building as quickly and as safely as possible in the event of an emergency. This will also allow the emergency services as easy and uninhibited access to the property or person in question as possible when required.
- 4.2 To achieve this, Aspire Housing will ask customers to keep internal/enclosed communal areas and the areas immediately surrounding entrances and exits clear of obstruction and/or items that may cause fire to be accelerated, prevent safe evacuation from the building or prevent safe access to the building in the event of an emergency. Aspire Housing will operate a zero-tolerance approach when it comes to enforcing this.

- 4.3 Tenancy and leasehold agreements that customers hold make clear the land that is let or sold as part of the home and therefore land that is not let with the home should not be used for additional storage. There is therefore an expectation that anyone living in an Aspire Housing property or leasehold properties will keep communal areas clear. This also includes any roof spaces as applicable.
- 4.4 This approach is intended to reduce risks and hazards associated with fire, to allow Aspire Housing to maintain communal areas where required and to ensure that residents homes are safe and enjoyable places to live.
- 4.5 Permissible and non-permissible items;

The list of non-permissible items includes but is not limited to;

- Potential ignition sources such as storage of cardboard
- Combustible materials such as garden furniture, artificial plants, plastic ornaments
- Electrical items, including battery operated lights
- Door mats
- Prams, pushchairs and toys
- Bicycles and scooters, including electric type
- Washing lines, wall mounted or strung wall to wall
- Items which may result in escape routes being narrowed such as, items of furniture, ornaments, plant pots
- Any items on windowsills including plants
- Mobility Scooters where an appropriate storage facility does not exist

Permissible Items

There are certain items or instances where items are permissible within the communal area, these are limited to the following.

- Notice boards installed, managed, and maintained by Aspire Housing
- Pictures/wall art (Enclosed Scheme corridors only) provided by Aspire Housing
- Purpose built structures/rooms e.g. bicycle storage area, mobility scooter store.

5.0 COMMUNAL LOUNGES OR ANY OTHER COMMUNAL ROOM WITHIN AN ENCLOSED SCHEME

- 5.1 Aspire Housing has a number of Enclosed Schemes with rooms within them that are for the usage of all residents that are within the scheme. Aspire Housing is responsible for the upkeep of these areas as well as the fixtures and fittings. Tenants own items should not be stored in these areas and the non-permissible list and other statements contained in section 4.5 apply here.

5.2 Permissible Items

- Festive lights (communal lounges only) subject to installation and testing by Aspire Housing
- Festive decorations (Enclosed Scheme communal lounges only) subject to installation and monitoring by Aspire Housing
- Soft furnishings (Enclosed Scheme communal lounges only) which must be compliant to the Furniture and Furnishings (Fire Safety) Regulations 1988. No furniture to be gifted or donated for storage in communal lounges
- Electrical items (Enclosed Scheme communal lounges) which have been tested in compliance with Aspire Housings portable appliance testing scheme
- Mobility Scooters – subject to the conditions outlined in the Mobility Scooter Policy

6.0 COMMUNAL GARDENS, PATHS, PARKING AREAS AND OTHER SURROUNDS

6.1 Outside areas should also be kept clear of personal items if this is land that is not let or sold with the property. Other items, such as wheelie bins, should be stored in the appropriate bin storage areas or in areas that are not likely to cause an obstruction or nuisance to residents. These should be a minimum of 5 meters from the building unless a purpose-built fire break has been constructed.

6.2 Aspire Housing car parks are for the use of customers and their visitors only and operate on a first come first served basis. Customers should park responsibly in the parking areas for the benefit of the enjoyment of all customers. The tenancy agreement advises customers on appropriate usage of parking areas. Customers must not obstruct access or egress for emergency service vehicles.

6.3 Barbeques or other fires on communal garden areas are prohibited.

6.4 Smoking in enclosed communal areas is prohibited by law. When residents are smoking or vaping in external communal areas, they should be respectful to other customers and maintain reasonable distance between doors and windows to avoid nuisance to other customers.

7.0 CHECKING COMMUNAL AREAS AND COMMUNAL AREA INSPECTIONS

7.1 It is part of the role of all colleagues of Aspire Housing to be vigilant regarding the risks relating to any issue of repairs and maintenance within Aspire Housing managed properties.

7.2 Communal areas will be inspected regularly by members of the Localities team to ensure that they are safe and enjoyable environments for people to live. They may also be inspected as part of inspections that are arranged with customers, such as Estate Inspections.

7.3 Aspire Housing will also arrange the inspection of communal areas for the purpose of carrying out Fire Risk Assessments.

8.0 TAKING ACTION WHEN ITEMS FOUND IN COMMUNAL AREAS

8.1 If items are found in communal areas and it is considered to be contravention of this policy, Aspire Housing will take action to remedy. Aspire Housing will consider the following before taking any action.

- Whether the item is of immediate health and safety risk to customers and visitors.
- Whether the item poses a risk, but this risk is not reasonably considered immediate, but requires remedy to reduce the overall risk to customers and visitors.
- Whether ownership can be reasonably determined and whether further investigations are necessary.
- The risk to Aspire Housing of removing an item without the knowledge or express permission of the property owner.

8.2 If items are, considered to be, of immediate risk, such as items that present risk of explosion or would present a significant acceleration of fire, immediate removal, and removal without notice to the item owner, will take place. Aspire Housing will store the item where the item is, considered to be, of significant value whilst enquiries take place to identify the item owner, should the owner be identified the cost of storing these items will be passed on to them and should be paid before the items are returned.

8.3 Items that will be considered to pose an immediate risk can include but are not limited to;

- Motorbikes/scooters
- Lawnmowers and other gardening equipment containing petrol and other fuels
- Hazardous chemicals, gas containers, flammable liquids and Barbeques

8.4 Appendix 1 will outline the step-by-step actions taken depending on the different circumstances that may arise. The tenancy agreement includes a condition that customers must not keep items which would constitute a health or fire safety risk in communal areas, section Your obligation B.2. Enforcement action will be considered to address a persistent or serious breach of tenancy.

9.0 COMMUNICATION

9.1 It is essential to communicate with customer the importance of keeping communal areas free from obstructions and hazards. Regular communication will take place with customers using a range of approaches including signs, newsletters, leaflets and social media. Aspire Housing will also support national campaigns such as Home Safety Week to emphasise the importance of this issue.

9.2 Appendix 2-5 include fire hazard sticker requesting items be removed within 24hrs to be applied at time of first identifying the hazard, Communal area items 1 to be

sent the day items have been noted in the communal area allowing 7 days for these to be removed. A TORT notice to be applied to the item after 7 days advising that the items will be disposed of in 14 days and a TORT letter to be sent directly to the customer/all customers within the block where the ownership cannot be verified, that should be used to communicate with customers regarding any issues.

10.0 RELATED POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

This policy should be read in conjunction with the following Aspire Housing documents:

- Mobility Scooter Policy – in draft
- Tenancy Agreement
- Leasehold Agreement
- Fire Safety Policy

This policy has been considered against our Equality and Diversity Policy and no additional provisions are required.