



YHN Common Areas Policy 2015

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1. Background

We manage around 28,000 rented and 1,500 leasehold properties on behalf of Newcastle City Council. This includes a wide range of property types, including over 12,000 properties in block dwellings (normally flats or maisonettes which have a shared entrance) and around 1000 sheltered housing flats in 24 schemes. Within the block dwellings and sheltered schemes there are many common areas, such as stairwells, landings, walkways, lounges, community rooms and storage areas. This policy statement explains our commitment to keeping these areas safe and in good condition, and why this is important to us.

2. What is our policy for common areas?

Our policy is to make sure that common areas in blocks are kept safe, clean, tidy and attractive.

3. Why do we need this policy?

We have to meet legislative requirements such as the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, which includes provisions that are relevant to common areas. For example, we have to:

- carry out our work in a way that does not create risks for others (eg members of the public, employees of other agencies, contractors etc.); and
- make sure that our premises and workplaces, including equipment, are safe.

This means that we need to ensure lifts and fire safety equipment are safe and are in good working order, and that common areas are kept clear of hazards.

We must also comply with other legislation including:

- The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 – this requires every block of flats including common areas to undergo a fire safety risk assessment by the landlord,
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 – this requires all blocks of flats to have a risk assessment of the health and safety of common areas if any cleaner, manager or repairs contractor enters them; and
- The Equality Act 2010 – this requires us to make reasonable adjustments to residential accommodation for disabled people when requested, which could impact on things like the storage of mobility scooters in communal areas.

As a housing provider, we are subject to regulation by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA). The HCA framework is based on a number of standards, including the Neighbourhood and Community Standard, which requires housing providers to:

- ‘keep the neighbourhood and common areas associated with the homes that they own clean and safe.’

This policy is intended to help us meet this regulatory requirement for common areas within block dwellings.

- **To show our commitment to customers**

We know that common areas are important to our customers. Environmental issues like the condition of common areas and the estates where people live are always top priorities when we carry out customer consultation activities. Our commitment to keeping common areas in good condition is part of our general commitment to provide excellent services to all of our customers.

- **To help us in our work**

If common areas are in good condition it helps us to let properties when they become empty. Prospective tenants are less likely to want to live in block dwellings if common areas are in a poor condition. Making sure that blocks are kept clean, tidy, safe and attractive also means we get higher satisfaction levels from tenants and fewer complaints, which adds to our reputation as an excellent organisation. We pay for cleaning some blocks, and for other services, so we also need to make sure that we are getting value for money for our customers.

- **To ensure that tenancy and lease conditions are met**

Tenancy and lease agreements and handbooks explain our responsibilities and tenants' and leaseholders' responsibilities. We give out an extra information guide to tenants of flats covering things like fire safety and rubbish disposal. The tenancy agreement explains that we are responsible for the following:

- 'If you live in a flat, we will take reasonable care to maintain the shared entrances, halls, stairways, lifts, passageways, rubbish chutes and lighting, and any other shared areas'.

The agreement also explains tenant responsibilities, including:

- 'If you live in a block, you and the other tenants are responsible for cleaning shared areas, entrances, hallways, staircases and landings, unless we have told you that this is the responsibility of a person we employ'

Tenants also have a responsibility to tell us about any repairs that are needed for which we are responsible. Tenants should tell us about repairs required or damage in common areas so we can get any necessary work carried out.

For leaseholders, responsibilities for common areas are covered in the lease and are also explained in the leaseholder handbook and on our website, which states:

- 'Your Landlord (NCC) is responsible for keeping the common or shared parts of your block in good repair. This means that we will look after the structure of the building, the landings and hallways and shared services such as

communal lighting, door entry systems, central heating system or hot water where you do not have your own independent system’.

The handbook also says:

- ‘We are responsible for maintaining the shared areas in your block, but everyone living in the block has a duty to keep them clean and use them properly

4. What do we mean by clean, tidy, safe and attractive?

What is clean, tidy, safe and attractive can mean different things to different people. For this reason, we have developed standards with our customers about what they can expect. We have also developed a photobook guide to inspecting estates to help with the inspections that we carry out with customers across every estate on an annual basis. The guide covers internal communal areas as well as external areas and explains how we grade estates using pictures of what each grade (gold, silver or bronze) looks like based on a number of different indicators such as floors, doors and windows. This guide is available on our website.

We explain the standards we require to contractors who carry out work in common areas on our behalf. For example, we have a Service Level Agreement with Newcastle City Council, which covers building cleaning for some blocks of flats. This agreement includes requirements such as the following:

- Landings, stairwells, exits, entrances, walls and ceilings must be free of dust, dirt, leaves, cobwebs, rubbish, graffiti etc.
- Windows and doors should be free of dust, marks, fingerprints etc.
- Overall appearance should be tidy and uncluttered, floor space should be clear, and fire access and exit doors are clear and not obstructed
- Common areas should smell fresh with no unpleasant odours
- Bin chute rooms should be disinfected and deodorised

5. What is our approach to managing common areas?

We want to encourage tenants to take a pride in where they live and therefore take a common sense approach where tenants want to improve the appearance of common areas, such as by hanging pictures on walls or putting doormats outside their front door. However, we also have a duty to keep these areas safe, so we cannot allow anything which is dangerous, creates an obstruction or is a fire safety hazard and will ask a tenant to remove anything we decide is not safe. Any tenant who is unsure about whether something is safe should check this with a member of staff.

6. Mobility Scooters

Mobility scooters improve the quality of life for many disabled people, some of whom live in properties we manage. We support the use of mobility scooters and will make

reasonable adjustments where we can to ensure they can be used effectively and safely.

Where a tenant or household member requests permission to use or store a mobility scooter in a block dwelling, we are required to consider this request and to decide whether suitable storage space is available, and if not, whether reasonable adjustments can be made to accommodate the request. Wherever possible we will help tenants or family members who need to use mobility scooters, although we may have to refuse requests where they are not practical for technical or health and safety reasons.

Unless suitable storage space is already available, or has been created as a result of reasonable adjustments, mobility scooters must not be stored or charged in communal areas such as corridors, landings, escape routes or stairwells. This is because they can cause an obstruction, and represent a significant fire risk when they are being charged. Reasonable adjustments might include making use of external storage areas, office space or communal lounges subject to a health and safety assessment.

7. Who manages common areas?

Responsibility for ensuring that common areas are maintained in line with this policy statement rests with Tenancy and Estate management staff for all block dwellings, except for sheltered housing schemes and other specialist accommodation, which is managed by the Sheltered Housing Service. Other staff, such as the Concierge Manager, Health and Safety Manager or Fire Safety Officer, may also be consulted for advice. A brief description of responsibilities is given below and more information about each of these services is provided on our website:

- **Tenancy and Estate Management Staff:** As part of our housing management service, tenancy and estate management staff manage most council properties in Newcastle and have overall responsibility for common areas, including maintaining standards and dealing with breaches of tenancy or complaints. Tenancy and Estate Managers have ultimate responsibility for making decisions around health and safety, mobility scooter storage and breach of tenancy action and involve other specialist staff if required.
- **Concierge Service:** we provide 5,800 Council tenants and leaseholders living in flats with a comprehensive Concierge service. Concierge staff have a range of duties around assisting and supporting tenants. Their role includes some responsibilities for common areas, such as maintaining a clean and safe environment, carrying out minor repairs such as replacing lighting, helping with bulk refuse disposal and documenting health and safety inspections including completing fire safety checks.
- **Sheltered Housing Service:** our sheltered housing service manages around 1000 sheltered housing properties in 24 sheltered housing schemes, 2 extra care schemes and 3 learning disability schemes across Newcastle. A Sheltered Officer for each scheme is responsible for carrying out daily checks to sheltered

housing schemes across Newcastle. A Sheltered Officer for each scheme is responsible for carrying out daily checks of common areas, including fire safety equipment, entrances, communal lounges, lifts, stairways and passages. These checks are to identify and resolve any health and safety issues (for example as a result of equipment failure, obstructions or fire hazards).

- **Environmental Services Team:** this team was established in 2012 as a result of a review of estate services and in recognition of the importance of these services to our customers. The team is responsible for managing the Estate Services SLA which includes provision for cleaning of common areas in multi-storey blocks, sheltered housing schemes and many other block dwellings.
- **Property Maintenance Team:** the Property Maintenance Team is responsible for services within block dwellings. This involves making sure that equipment and facilities are kept in good repair through either responsive or planned maintenance. This covers things like lifts, fire safety equipment, bin chutes and door entry systems.
- **Health and Safety Team:** our Health and Safety Team is responsible for ensuring that our legal obligations for common areas of buildings are complied with by ensuring that risk assessments and fire safety precautions are in place. The Health and Safety Manager and Fire Safety Officer are also available to offer advice to staff around common areas, for example about whether tenant adornments (such as doormats, planting boxes or ornaments) present any fire or safety risks. The team is also responsible for a series of health and safety codes of conduct, some of which give specific advice in relation to common areas, such as the following:
 - YHN10: Sheltered Housing Officer's fire safety role
 - YHN11: Emergency fire procedures in blocks
 - YHN17: Concierge fire safety role
 - YHN24: Passenger lifts in high rise blocks and sheltered schemes

8. Equality and diversity

An equality analysis has been completed for this policy. The analysis has shown that implementation of the policy will not impact in a negative way on any of the nine protected characteristic groups. The policy should have a positive impact on disabled customers who use mobility scooters, as it will improve our response to issues associated with storage and use.

9. Responsibility for monitoring and reviewing the policy

Our Head of Income and Tenancy Management is responsible for monitoring the Common Areas Policy, and for ensuring that it is reviewed on a regular basis.

11. Key contacts

For any clarification on issues covered by this policy, please contact:

- Allison Allison, Head of Income and Tenancy Management
- Paul Lumsden, Health and Safety Manager