



Bristol City Council Housing and Landlord Services

Clear and Safe Escape Routes Policy

Version 1.0

Approved by: Committee/ HSLT/ Head of Service/ Service Manager

Author: Policy and Practice Team / Other

Date approved: 18/02/2026

Date for review: 3 years to 2028

Service Area: Service name

Classification: Compliance /Fire Safety

History of most recent policy changes			
Date	Page	Change	Origin of change (e.g. legislation)
2025	Whole document	Policy update	Covers medium rise and considers factors such as build type etc impacting on fire risk
2022	Whole document	Zero tolerance approach in high rise	Recent fires in high rise blocks
2017	Whole document	Policy Update	In response to Grenfell
2013	Appendix added	Policy update	Added detail on clear corridors approach
2011	Whole document	Policy Created	Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order

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1. Purpose

- 1.1 This policy sets out how Bristol City Council's (BCC) Housing Directorate will safeguard the communal areas of our blocks of flats; keeping them free from obstructions or hazards to protect the health and safety of residents, visitors, and staff and ensure safe evacuation in the event of a fire or other emergency.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all communal areas of all blocks of flats owned by Bristol City Council's (BCC) Homes and Landlord Services (HLS). A 'communal area' is any area that is not within the confines of a resident's home. For example - corridors, walkways, balconies, and balcony approaches, stairways, landings, lobbies, meter cupboards, bin stores, entrances to buildings and communal kitchens or lounges. In blocks of flats, the protected shafts enclosing the services that run through the building are also considered to be communal areas.
- 2.2 Potential obstructions/hazards may include, but are not limited to, 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 furniture, shopping trolleys, loose carpets, unwanted mail and newspapers, mobility scooters, and e-bikes/e-scooters.

3. Aims and objectives

- 3.1 The main aims and objectives of this policy are to:
- Ensure the health and safety of residents and their visitors, staff, contractors, and anyone else who enters BCC owned property.
 - Prevent the accumulation of items in communal areas that could contribute to fire risks or hinder safe evacuation in the event of an emergency.

4. Roles and responsibilities and authority

- 4.1 Roles and responsibilities are set out in Appendix A of this document.

5. The policy

- 5.1 Under Article 14 of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 Bristol City Council is legally obliged (as the 'responsible person') to regularly inspect the common parts of our blocks of flats to maintain the safety of residents, and 'ensure that routes to emergency exits from premises and the exits themselves are kept clear at all times'. We also have duties under the Housing Act 2004 to identify and protect against potential hazards (such as the risk of fire) in our properties.
- 5.2 While we understand that some residents may wish to personalise communal areas to create a more welcoming environment, this must be balanced with the need to maintain a clear space to prevent the spread of fire, allow residents a safe escape route and provide uninhibited access for the fire and rescue services (FRS).
- 5.3 We will take a 'Clear and Safe' approach across all our blocks of flats, irrespective of building height. The only difference in approach will be that in Buildings of Lower Fire Risk (BLFRs) we will allow more time before we remove items that do not present an immediate fire risk, compared to the timescales for Buildings of Higher Fire Risk (BHFRs). When deciding which buildings pose a greater fire risk, we consider not just

building height but also factors such as building type/construction and existing arrangements for evacuation in case of an emergency.

- 5.4 We will work with residents wherever possible to resolve any storage issues, but enforcement action will be taken if necessary to maintain safe escape routes within the communal areas of blocks of flats.
- 5.5 Buildings of Higher Fire Risk (BHFRs)
We will take a strict enforcement approach to all items left in communal areas in blocks that are:
- five storeys or more (or 11 metres and above) in height, or
 - only have a single means of escape, or
 - buildings of any height that have (whether temporarily or permanently) a 'simultaneous evacuation' policy in place.
- 5.6 It is essential that all escape routes are kept entirely clear of items of furniture, buggies, mobility scooters, plants, clothes drying facilities, rubbish, bicycles etc.
- 5.7 In higher risk buildings, any unauthorised item that BCC considers to be an obstruction or hazard, will be removed either **immediately or within 24 hours**. We reserve the right to remove all items without notice, however we will, where reasonable, provide warnings. Warnings will generally be in the form of a notice or stickers attached to, or near to, unpermitted items and will advise that the items must be removed within 24 hours. We will at any time thereafter and without further notice return and remove items. No warnings will be given for high-risk items such as objects which are highly flammable or that block access routes.
- 5.8 Items believed to be of value (such as mobility scooters or other types of powered vehicle) will be kept in storage for up to 28 days and, if unclaimed, disposed of. If this happens more than once, there may be a re-charge to the resident to cover the costs of the removal and storage. The security and protection of banned items is secondary to removing the fire safety risk to other residents within the block. We reserve the right to remove items to ensure fire safety in blocks. No responsibility will be taken by BCC for damage caused to articles that are removed from escape routes and placed in storage.
- 5.9 Wherever possible, we will examine options to provide alternative storage options for residents with mobility scooters living in buildings of higher fire risk, as the scooters can be quite large and not always easily stored within flats. The provision of alternative storage areas will be subject to both funding and the ability to identify an alternative site at the building to store the mobility scooters safely.
- 5.10 Whilst every effort will be made to provide alternative storage for mobility scooters, where this is not possible, we will still need to remove items from escape routes to ensure they remain clear of hazards.
- 5.11 Buildings of Lower Fire Risk (BLFRs)
A lower risk building is defined as one which is:
- less than five storeys or is less than 11 metres in height and
 - where flats have access to more than one means of escape.

- 5.12 In lower risk buildings items which pose an immediate or significant fire risk (i.e. items blocking fire exits, combustible materials, potential ignition sources) will still be removed **within 24 hours**.

As above, we reserve the right to remove all items without notice, however we will, where reasonable, provide warnings. On lower risk items we will attach a sticker/notice advising the owner that the item needs to be removed from the communal area within 7 days.

If the item is not removed by that date, we will remove the item(s) ourselves. Items believed to be of value (such as mobility scooters or other forms of powered vehicle) will be kept in storage for up to 28 days and, if unclaimed, disposed of. If this happens more than once, there may be a re-charge to the resident to cover the costs of the removal and storage.

5.13 Non-Permitted Items (applies to all buildings)

- Any soft furnishings, including bedding and mattresses, clothing, footwear, or any other combustible items.
- Carpet, net curtains, and blinds.
- Rubbish including bins and recycling
- Old newspapers/letters etc
- Washing lines or clothes dryers (within enclosed corridors and staircases).
- Potted plants - real or imitation. No hanging baskets, no windowsill/wall/rail fixed plant boxes or foliage.
- Pictures or posters.
- Any item of furniture, ornaments, bicycles, scooters, pushchairs, shopping trolleys, strollers, boxes, white goods or any other such article.
- Mobility Scooters and similar powered mobility aids (such as e-scooters and e-bikes) are not allowed to be stored nor have the batteries recharged in communal areas. Residents may only store a mobility scooter within their own home (unless there is a designated mobility scooter storage area provided which has space available).

We will allow residents who cannot accommodate their mobility scooter within their own home to remove and charge their batteries inside their flat (we recommend an area which already has a closable door and smoke/heat detectors installed, such as a kitchen) **provided that** the mobility scooter is moved to an area of the building which is not obstructing an escape route.

E-bikes and scooters must always be stored within flats and owners should follow the same safety precautions as mobility scooter owners when charging batteries.

- No electrical items including trailing cables from windows.
- Any items that contain fuel (even if empty).
- Barbecues and any other cooking appliances.
- Cleaning equipment i.e., mop bucket and mop, sweeping brush and vacuum cleaners.
- Patio heaters(gas/electric), firepits and chimineas.
- Christmas trees and/or other celebratory decorations.
- Fireworks, paper or other types of lanterns.
- Candles, oil/paraffin lamps and incense.

5.14 Permitted Items (applies to all buildings)

- 5.15 Furniture in Community Rooms/Lounges/Foyers of Buildings
Any upholstered furniture (whether bought or donated) for use in community rooms/lounges or foyers within residential blocks of flats or sheltered housing must ensure compliance with the [Furniture and Furnishings \(Fire\) \(Safety\) Regulations 1988](#) to maintain safety and comfort for all residents.
- 5.16 Compliant new or second-hand furniture will have a permanent label (commonly located on the frame of the furniture item or the underside of a cushion) which will include a "carelessness causes fire" warning. Residents are requested not to donate/leave unwanted furniture in community rooms/lounges etc unless it is compliant as any furniture found that does not meet these standards will be removed from the building and disposed of.
- 5.17 Storage on Private Balconies
Residents who have access to a private balcony are advised that the following items are **not permitted** to be stored on them for fire safety reasons:
- Barbeques
 - Fireworks
 - Outdoor Patio Heaters
 - Gas cylinders
 - Flammable liquids
 - Fuel or battery powered vehicles
- Balconies are open spaces and form part of overall building safety. They are designed for light use and should not be overloaded. Please ensure any items placed on them are stored safely and securely and do not pose a risk to other residents.
- 5.18 Communications
There will be regular communication to all residents explaining our approach to managing our communal areas. This may be via:
- Information provided on the BCC website
 - Our 'Housing News' publication
 - Notices in communal areas of blocks of flats
 - Correspondence with tenants/leaseholders
- 5.19 Every new tenant within a residential building comprising of two or more flats will receive information regarding fire safety arrangements for that building. This information will be reviewed and updated in accordance with the Fire Safety (England) Regulations, 2022.
- 5.20 Tenant and Leaseholder Responsibilities
The Fire Safety Act (2021) and Building Safety Act (2022) increased safety duties for landlords/building owners, but also included increased responsibilities for tenants, leaseholders and occupiers. The following is not an exhaustive list, but responsibilities for tenants and leaseholders include:
- Keeping communal areas clear. You and other residents must be able to easily escape if there is a fire and firefighters must be able to easily get into the building. This is why you must never block:
 - Escape routes
 - Emergency routes
 - Emergency exits

- Fire exits
 - Doors leading from your home
 - Balcony walkways
 - Any shared landing, hallway or staircase
- Letting BCC Housing Directorate representatives into your home to carry out important safety checks and works. All of our staff and contractors will carry photo ID.
 - Following health and safety advice or instructions.
 - Keeping fire doors closed and following the building's procedure for fire evacuation.
 - Asking permission from the Council before carrying out any alterations to your property.
 - Not removing door closers and never removing or changing any door, particularly the front door to the property. This includes changing letterboxes or fitting a cat flap. Such changes can make homes less fire safe and may put you or your family and neighbours at risk.
 - Not damaging, removing or interfering with relevant safety items, such as fire doors, signage, sprinklers, smoke alarms or fire extinguishers and using balcony areas safely.
 - Telling the Council if you or someone you live with would need help to get out of their property in emergency.
 - Reporting to the Council any incidents of other people in the building behaving in a way that could make the building less fire safe – for example storing things in communal areas or changing fire doors.

5.21 The requirement to keep communal areas clear of obstacles and fire hazards is also clearly stated in BCC's [tenancy agreement](#) and in information provided to our [leaseholders](#) and on the [fire safety for tenants and leaseholders](#) page of our website.

5.1 Legal Context and Consumer Standards

5.1.1 A list of relevant legislation is included as Appendix B. This policy responds to the [Social Housing \(Regulation\) Act 2023](#) and the associated [Regulatory Standards](#) by addressing the following requirements:

- **Safety and Quality Standard:** When acting as landlords, registered providers must take all reasonable steps to ensure the health and safety of tenants in their homes and associated communal areas.
- **Neighbourhood & Community Standard:** Registered providers must work co-operatively with tenants, other landlords and relevant organisations to take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of shared spaces.

5.2 Equality and Diversity

5.2.1 BCC will adopt a person-centred approach to fire safety, taking prompt, appropriate and tailored action to safeguard residents where there is a particular risk from fire. If a resident lives in one of our high rise blocks or a block with a 'simultaneous evacuation' policy currently in place *and* may be at greater risk due to age, known vulnerabilities, health conditions, communication difficulties or is reliant on caregivers or support staff, we will undertake a Person Centred Fire Risk Assessment (PCFRA) to identify what additional support they may require. Those considered high risk may also be considered for a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP).

5.2.2 An equalities impact assessment (EqIA) will be completed for this policy.

5.3 Complaints

If residents are unhappy with the services provided by BCC or how their concerns have been handled, they're encouraged to use the official complaints procedure. [Complaints and feedback](#)

6. Quality Assurance

6.1 Publishing

This policy will be published on the BCC Website and communicated to relevant operational teams via policy briefings and other appropriate communications.

6.2 Review

This policy will be reviewed in three years or sooner if there is a change to legal or regulatory requirements, in accordance with our procedures and the law.

6.3 Monitoring and Reporting Requirements

Service delivery and performance is measured against the Housing and Landlord Services Performance Framework.

BCC uses performance management to enhance service delivery standards and improve tenant experience. We measure performance to monitor success. In relation to this Policy BCC will use performance measures and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) based around the Estates and Sites (Caretaking) [Service Standards](#).

Services need to meet the KPI's set and other reporting responsibilities to the regulator. BCC monitor satisfaction, using data and insight from, as a minimum reporting in relation to:

- Complaints
- Tenant Satisfaction Measures

7. Appendices

Appendix A: roles and responsibilities

Director of Homes and Landlord Services

In the Council's [constitution](#), the Executive Director of Housing has delegated to the Director of Homes and Landlord Services responsibility for:

- High Risk buildings (HRBs) of 18m or more under the Building Safety Act 2022. Ensuring that the council's premises comply with the duties imposed by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- Fulfilling the roles of accountable person and principal accountable person and duty holder for higher-ri

Building Safety Team and Fire Safety Manager

Building Safety Team responsibilities:

- Commissioning a contractor to undertake Fire Risk Assessments (FRAs).
- Monitoring to ensure FRA follow-up actions are completed by relevant teams.

Fire Safety Manager responsibilities:

- Reviewing and randomly sampling completed FRAs for quality assurance.

More information on Fire Risk Assessments in the [Fire Safety Policy](#)..

Estate Management (Housing Officers, Caretaking Services, STOP Services)

Responsible for:

- Ensuring, as far as reasonably practicable, that tenants keep communal corridors, stairs, doors, emergency exits, and other means of escape free from obstructions or hazardous/combustible materials.
- Ensuring removal of obstructions/hazards clearly attributable to a particular tenant in accordance with policy and procedure.
- Ensuring removal of unidentified obstructions/hazards by caretakers or suitable contractors.

All Housing staff and contractors

Responsible for:

- Keeping communal areas free of packaging or items that may pose a fire or trip hazard, and removing such items once work is complete.
- Reporting any observed breaches of the Safe Escape Routes policy to Estate Management.

Appendix B: Legal and policy context

This policy operates in line with existing legislation, regulations, and good practice, including but not limited to:

External

- Building Regulations 2010 (Document M)
- Building Safety Act 2022
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health 2002 (COSHH)
- Fire Safety Act 2021 and Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022
- Environmental Protection Act 1990
- HM Government publication 'Fire safety in purpose-built blocks of flats' guide
- Housing Act 1985
- Housing Act 2004 – introduced the Housing Health and Safety rating system (HHSRS)
- Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 - Section 41 Lost and Uncollected Property
- National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Mobility Scooter Guidance for Residential Buildings
- Public Liability Act 1936
- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Torts (Interference with Goods) Act 1977

Internal

- Fire Safety Policy
- Mobility Scooter Policy
- Fire Safety – Residential PEEPs (Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan) Procedure

This policy is also consistent with our tenancy and lease agreements.

Appendix C: Glossary of terms

- **BCC:** Bristol City Council
- **BHFR:** Buildings of Higher Fire Risk
- **BLFR:** Buildings of Lower Fire Risk
- **Building Safety Act:** Legislation introduced after the Grenfell Tower fire aimed at making sure all new building work complies with Building Regulations, with a particular focus on buildings considered to be higher risk. It sets strict rules for designing, constructing and managing buildings and clearly defines the responsibilities of building owners, designers and contractors, known as 'duty holders'.

- **Communal areas/common parts:** The parts of a building shared with other residents, e.g. grounds, paths, stairs, corridors, entrances, bin stores, storage areas, laundry areas, balconies, communal lounges, communal kitchens, community spaces and some parking areas.
- **EqIA:** Equalities Impact Assessment
- **Fire Safety Act 2021:** Legislation that reinforces the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order, 2005, adding that 'responsible persons' for multi-occupied residential buildings must manage and reduce fire risks for the building's structure and external walls, including cladding, balconies, and windows, and entrance doors to individual flats.
- **FRA:** Fire Risk Assessment – a detailed assessment undertaken to identify the hazards that may pose a fire risk in our buildings and the actions necessary to address them.
- **FRS:** Fire and Rescue Services
- **HLS:** Homes and Landlord Services
- **Housing Act 2004:** Introduced the [Housing Health and Safety Rating System \(HHSRS\)](#), a risk-based evaluation tool to help local authorities identify and protect against potential risks and hazards to health and safety in housing stock. Hazards are categorized as either Category 1 (serious) or Category 2 (other), with local authorities having a duty to act on Category 1 hazards and discretion to act on Category 2 hazards.
- **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order, 2005** - the main piece of legislation governing fire safety in buildings in England and Wales. It applies to all workplaces and the common parts of buildings containing 2 or more domestic premises.