

# Safety in communal areas

Information for residents living in blocks of flats



As your landlord, **bpha** has responsibilities for the home in which you live. One of those is making sure that the structure of buildings and communal areas within them meet fire and safety requirements.

This leaflet gives you more information about this important issue.

## Why communal areas need to be kept clear

We are responsible for the communal areas in your block and we have a duty to make sure you can escape in an emergency. If you couldn't get out because you tripped over a mat or were hit by exploding glass from a picture, **bpha** would be responsible – even if it was you who put it there.

This means that we have to be strict about what you can leave outside your property. Our policy is that you may not use communal areas for the storage of your possessions or to dump unwanted goods or place decorative items outside your front door.

We are aware that a number of residents feel the policy is unfair, particularly around removal of decorative items. However, we need to apply the policy consistently and fairly to all.

## Legislation

New legislation that focuses on fire risks has placed extra responsibilities on us to ensure that if there was a fire in your block, there would be nothing in the communal areas which made it difficult to get out or could give off smoke that would affect you or hinder the Fire Service in their rescue duties.

Part 1 of the Housing Act 2004 requires housing authorities to deal with identified or known hazards within residential properties. The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

replaces previous fire safety legislation and requires **bpha** to carry out a risk assessment, part of which focuses on escape routes and therefore includes communal areas.

The Fire Service, Environmental Health and **bpha** all have duties in this legislation and work together to ensure risks to residents living in blocks of flats are minimised.

### Obvious items we can't allow:

- Pushchairs
- Bikes
- Shopping trolleys

### Not so obvious items we can't allow:

- Door mats
- Plants
- Pictures

## Why we're acting now

Statistics produced by the fire service in response to an increase in fire-related deaths have shown that particular types of property present a higher risk.

Blocks of flats over three floors high with communal areas are categorised as high

Individual flat **entrance doors** for both tenants and leaseholders are the property of **bpha** and also provide protection from fire so no alterations should be made to these without written consent from us.

risk and, since the introduction of the new legislation, have been the focus for action.

Reasons for this include the effects of toxic smoke given off by stored items/rubbish/ornaments, storage of volatile or combustible items and non-safety glass exploding when exposed to intense heat. Any stored item, such as a bike, could make it difficult to get out, especially for a disabled person.

Although blocks that are less than three floors high are considered to be lower risk, storage of items or rubbish left in these communal areas increases the risk of harm for all residents, particularly in the event of a fire.

### Action

How you manage the risk inside your own property is – within the terms of your tenancy agreement or lease – up to you, although we will always be happy to give advice or put you in touch with the Fire Service for a free assessment of your home.

However, the communal areas are the responsibility of **bpha**. As a resident, you have no rights to store or display anything within the communal areas as these are for access to and from the blocks for residents and visitors.

The most important piece of work we can do as a landlord is to stop problems happening

**Balconies** in flats can also present a high level of risk. A number of fires have spread very quickly as items on balconies have caught fire and flames have leapt up the side of buildings. If you have a balcony, any stored items must be fire-proof and in particular, barbecues, fuel containers and gas bottles are absolutely not allowed.

rather than react. Our approach is to manage communal areas in a way that will minimise risk and meet legal requirements.

Working with Environmental Health and the Fire Service, and taking into account our responsibilities in relation to health and fire safety legislation, we have decided that we will not allow anything to be stored in the communal areas.

Periodically we will notify you that we are inspecting and clearing communal areas to ensure this policy is being implemented. So the best way to look after your possessions is to keep them in your own property.

For residents who have a mobility aid that is currently stored in the communal area, please contact your housing officer urgently so we can discuss possible solutions. These items also present a health and fire safety risk that must be managed.

**Cleaning** is carried out as part of the service provision in our blocks and often cannot be completed to the standard agreed because items left in communal areas obstruct workers.

**'Stored'** items are not the same as **'dumped'** items. It is a breach of tenancy/lease to dump rubbish. If rubbish is proven to have been left by you or your visitor, you will be charged for its removal.

## Safety in Communal areas

For a large print, audio  
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