

Housing Estate Management Policy

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to set out South Holland District Council's (SHDC) overall approach to managing estates where the Council's residential properties are situated. This policy relates to the following:

- properties accounted for within the Housing Revenue Account
- accommodation funded by the Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) and Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP).

Estate Management is concerned with maintaining the physical condition, cleanliness and safety of the housing environment in which we operate in order to preserve its fabric and to promote community pride.

The policy and underlying procedures reflect our landlord role through the provision of safe, secure and well-maintained neighbourhoods, and will allow the Council to provide a service which reflects our statutory responsibilities and good practice.

The Council is committed to delivering well managed neighbourhoods providing a better quality of life for our residents and acting as a deterrent to anti-social behaviour, neighbour nuisance and crime.

The Estate Management Policy forms one element of a wider policy framework for Housing and should be read in conjunction with the following policies:

- Income Management Policy
- Tenancy Management Policy
- Repairs and Fitness for Habitation Policy.

The policy is aligned to the terms and conditions of the tenancy agreement and aims to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the obligations of both tenants and the council as the Landlord. The policy also reflects the Charter for Social Housing Residents by supporting the following policy measures:

- To be safe in your home
- To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in, with your landlord keeping your home in repair.

Nothing in this policy changes the legal position that the Council is not under any legal duty to any tenant or resident to abate nuisance caused by a third party in a property demised to them where the Council has neither let the property for the purposes of the third party doing the act likely to cause a nuisance, nor authorised the third party to do an act likely to cause a nuisance.

Please note where this policy makes reference to 'tenants' relates to tenants, licensees and leaseholders.

Legal Framework

The Council will ensure that the Estate Management Policy complies with current legislation and, promotes good practice, to assist all residents to understand their respective responsibilities.

In formulating this policy, we recognise that all residents have rights under the Data Protection Act 2018, GDPR 2018, Freedom of Information Act 2000, Human Rights Act 1998 and may have rights arising under the Equality Act 2010. In the implementation of this policy, every effort will be made to ensure that these rights are not breached, and no individual or group is treated unfairly or unlawfully discriminated against.

The Council must also pay regard to related legislation including the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, Protection from Eviction Act 1977, the Housing Act 1985, the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, the Law of Property Act 1925, the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008, the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Fraud Act 2006, the Localism Act 2011, the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 and the Prevention of Social Housing Fraud Act 2013.

Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of this Policy are to:

- Enable tenants and their household to live in well managed and maintained housing within an environment that is attractive, safe and secure, free from nuisance, annoyance, intimidation and harassment, in which people will want to live.
- Ensure that tenants are aware of, and accept, their responsibilities and SHDC's responsibilities regarding the upkeep of their homes and the surrounding area.
- Promote partnership working where appropriate with the appropriate external agencies and internal council departments to develop and sustain safe & secure environments.
- Contribute to developing sustainable communities which are popular and well-kept in which void levels are low and crime & nuisance is kept to a minimum.
- Ensure that our tenants are aware of the council's commitment to, and responsibility for, good estate management (as a landlord) through the consultation and participation process
- Encourage our tenants to take ownership for reporting issues they encounter on the estates by being aware of how & who to report these to.

Providing a safe and well-maintained neighbourhood

The Council is committed to making our neighbourhoods places that residents are proud and happy to live in. We will maintain and improve the safety, cleanliness and attractiveness of neighbourhoods. We will also provide residents with information on who and how to report issues.

This commitment includes:

- As part of routine visits to our estates, Officers (and contractors acting on behalf of SHDC) will assess communal areas and land surrounding our properties for risks/issues.
- Conducting programmed Estate Inspections
- Officers being pro-active in dealing with tenancy issues particularly where there is a potential breach of tenancy conditions.
- Avoiding the use of security screens and doors on void properties, where possible, as we believe that the use of such measures affects the appearance of estates, attracts undue attention and can have an adverse effect on levels of demand
- Maintaining and cleaning our communal areas and open spaces
- Ensuring our communal areas are compliant with health and safety & fire safety legislation
- Carrying out routine garden maintenance on vacant properties where tenants have been decanted for urgent health and safety repairs
- Protecting green space and addressing environmental Anti-Social Behaviour.

Estate Inspections

A programme of estate inspections are carried out by Housing Neighbourhood Officers to identify any potential issues on estates and garage sites.

Estate Inspections take on a holistic approach where a variety of elements are considered, including:

- Gardens
- Property conditions
- Vehicles – scrap, abandoned
- Fly tipping
- Vandalism
- Trees
- Rubbish
- Play areas
- Communal greens
- Roads and pathways
- Communal sheds
- Garage and parking sites

Issues arising from these walkabouts will be addressed by the relevant Officer or forwarded to the appropriate agencies for their attention.

The standard of work carried out by our contractors will also be assessed during these inspections and as part of routine visits to properties by Housing, Property and Repairs Officers.

The condition of resident's gardens is monitored as part of these visits and where necessary, enforcement action will be taken as per the Tenancy Management policy.

Where possible, tenants will be encouraged to take part in these inspections and to raise any concerns they may have with their estates.

Open Spaces

We ensure that our open spaces are maintained by a programme including grass cutting, weed maintenance, hedge cutting and tree surgery. The following programme is in place:

- Grass cutting is carried out from spring to autumn with start dates dependent on the weather. Communal grass will be cut roughly every 14 working days, approximately 10 times each year between the months of March and November
- Shrubs and bushes will be cut back annually each winter. They will be pruned as and when necessary, between the months of April and October.
- A litter pick will be carried out each time the maintenance contractor is on site
- Weed killing will be carried out as required between the months of March to September - a minimum of once per year.
- Raising of tree canopies will be carried out each winter.

External common areas on shared houses, flat schemes and community centres are maintained by a programme including:

- keeping external paths, communal gardens, fire escapes and car parks clear of debris and litter
- monitoring bin stores
- keeping external communal areas free of weeds
- ensuring hedges are cut back and communal gardens tidy and well maintained
- checking lighting is in working order and sufficient.

The costs incurred in meeting these obligations is incorporated into a service charge and/or deducted from rent collection and included as part of the annual service charge bill for leaseholders.

Trees

We will maintain trees that are on Council-owned land. Checks are carried out to establish whether the tree is within a Conservation Area or has a Tree Preservation Order before any work is begun. If the tree is within a Conservation Area or has a Tree Preservation Order, only works that fall under the category of 'dead, dying, dangerous or diseased' may be carried out. Otherwise, no works will be undertaken until permission is sought by the Planning Department. The cost of works may be subject to service charges.

We do not cut trees back purely because they drop a lot of leaves, unless this causes a hazard in communal areas.

Invasive plants

Plants such as Japanese knotweed, Hogweed and Ivy can cause severe damage to communal grounds and can take several years for successful removal. We will take reasonable steps to ensure invasive plants are identified and treated/removed at the earliest opportunity. These plants will be removed in line with good horticultural practice and legislation where applicable. Residents may be service charged for the removal and ongoing treatment of invasive plants. Any resident found to have planted, introduced or caused spread of these plants will be liable for the cost of the removal.

Children's play equipment

We provide and maintain children's play areas on Housing land throughout the district. These are insured, maintained and inspected in accordance with BS EN 1176 parts 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,10,11 and RoSPA guidance.

A programme of inspections is carried out during the year to detect vandalism and certain types of minor wear.

Annual inspections are carried out by a specialist who assesses for vandalism, minor and major wear, long-term structural problems, changes in standard compliance and design practice, risk assessment etc.

A painting programme is in place and we seek to immediately carry out any remedial works reported to us to ensure that the equipment is safe for use and meets all health and safety/compliance requirements. Any equipment found to no longer meet the required minimum standard will be decommissioned until it is either repaired or replaced.

Environmental Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB)

We aim to minimise incidents of Environmental ASB and respond promptly when incidents are identified. Environmental ASB covers a variety of acts such as:

- dog fouling
- graffiti
- litter
- fly tipping
- abandoned and nuisance vehicles.

It is our aim to keep all estates safe and clean. The council has a zero tolerance stance to illegal graffiti and will take enforcement action against offenders – further information can be found in the Council's Graffiti and Street Art Management Policy. Where graffiti is considered to be racist or offensive, it will be removed where possible within 24 hours of being reported. All other illegal graffiti will be removed approximately within 10 days as per the Environmental Services Team service standards.

Fly tipping is a crime that blights our communities, it is unsightly, can be hazardous and can lead to injuries both to the public and wildlife and is costly to remove. We aim to remove rubbish that is considered to be a health and safety hazard by the next working day (as per the Environmental Services Team service standards).

Efforts will be made to contact the owners of abandoned vehicles with each case assessed individually. If the owner and/or the registered keeper of a vehicle is identified, then the vehicle has not been abandoned. Investigations into abandonment will be conducted by the Community Safety Team and will normally be progressed within 5 working days of being notified.

The Community Safety Team will investigate instances of reported Environmental ASB and work with partner agencies and internal departments within the Council to identify the offender and take the appropriate enforcement action.

We will listen and encourage our residents to report all acts of environmental ASB to Housing Officers and other relevant organisations such as the Police.

Where tenants, members of their household or their visitors are found to be responsible for such acts, they will initially be recharged for making good. We will also consider enforcement action against their tenancy and/or seeking an injunction and if necessary, possession of their home.

Garage Sites and Parking

The Council owns and manages garages and garage plots. Garages and garage plots are let on a licence agreement - the licensee has no right to buy the site and there is no right of succession.

The purpose of garage sites and parking areas is for the storage of motor vehicles only. Garage sites and parking areas must not be used for the repairing or fixing of vehicles without prior permission from ourselves. No trailer, caravan or boat should be stored in parking areas or on garage sites. Vehicles may be removed where they are considered to be in a dangerous or derelict condition.

The Council has a responsibility to maintain and repair the garages. Licensees may be offered a garage on the same site or another local site if their garage is considered to be uneconomical to repair or the site is selected for an alternative use, although there is no obligation upon the Council to do so. We will charge for replacement locks to garages as a result of lost keys. Upon termination of the licence agreement, the licensee is responsible for clearing any items or belongings to ensure that the garage is suitable to re-let. Where a garage plot is abandoned, evicted or terminated it is the licensee's responsibility to remove the existing garage structure. If this is not done, the Council may take steps to do so, having served the appropriate notice, and recharge the former licensee any costs incurred.

All tenants, leaseholders and garage licensees must adhere to the obligations set down in their respective agreements relating to driveways, garage sites and parking

areas. Where a tenant, leaseholder or licensee fails to meet any of these obligations, appropriate action will be taken. This may include action to encourage them to adhere to the conditions of their agreement, or alternatively their agreement may be terminated.

Property boundaries

The property boundaries are identified using both the SHDC Live WebMaps system (Dynamic maps) and Land Registry title plans. Boundaries are identified through the creation of a TP1 conveyance plan as part of a Right to Buy application. This is carried out by an external independent surveyor.

Internal communal areas (shared houses, flats and community centres)

South Holland District Council has 11 Sheltered Housing community centres, 5 flat schemes (3 of which include communal lounges) and 3 shared houses located throughout the district.

Sheltered Housing schemes have communal areas which may include lounges, guest rooms, communal bathing facilities and gardens. Tenants within Sheltered Housing will be expected to maintain the comfort and safety of other residents and visitors through appropriate use of communal areas.

Maintenance of the communal areas is the responsibility of the Council. We are committed to ensuring that our communal spaces are safe and secure, and as part of this we seek to provide assurance that cleaning, health and safety and fire safety in communal areas is appropriately managed.

Fire Safety

We provide employees, contractors, and residents with clear advice on fire safety, including evacuation policies and fire signage within communal buildings. Signage is installed throughout the building and each resident has a copy of the evacuation policy displayed on the back of their door. Each new resident also has a hard copy of the evacuation policy included in their sign-up pack.

We will respond appropriately to meet the needs of residents who inform us they have a disability such as a hearing impairment and install appropriate equipment to ensure they are alerted in the event of a fire and can evacuate or remain safe. Questions are asked at sign-up regarding any difficulties they may encounter in evacuating the building, and Sheltered Housing tenants' ability to evacuate is reviewed quarterly. General Needs, RSPA and NSAP tenants are assessed as part of any routine visits by Housing Officers and/or appointments are made to follow up concerns raised by other professionals.

The Council has a close working arrangement with the Fire Service including assessments to support evacuation and minimise risk in the case of hoarding. For further information around fire safety measures relating to concerns inside the home, please see the Tenancy Management Policy.

All Officers have had rigorous Fire Safety training (refreshed annually) including undertaking on-going Fire Risk Assessments and are aware of the importance of housekeeping.

We will ensure communal areas are kept clear of items that can increase the intensity of a fire, increase the risk of a fire starting by the introduction of an ignition source or giving off toxic smoke. It is essential therefore that all communal areas are kept free from personal effects, plants, and tables. Items such as mobility scooters, bikes and pushchairs left in communal areas can cause trip hazards and obstruction to occupants escaping the fire and the Fire Service entering the building to rescue occupants or tackle the fire. No items should be stored under communal staircases unless the area is enclosed by fire protection.

We operate a strict policy in communal areas and will take enforcement action against tenants that breach this. Tenants will be requested to remove any other items in communal areas and/or the Council will move items and dispose of them.

We ensure that we are fully up to date on legislation and have a working group set up that meets monthly to review fire safety.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety Order 2005) requires us to publish who has responsibility for fire safety on our premises. They are as follows:

- Responsible Person: Assistant Director - Housing
Overall responsibility for reducing the risk from fire and making sure people can safely escape if there is a fire.
- Competent Person: Housing Property Services Manager
Assists the Responsible Person in undertaking the preventative and protective fire safety measures.

Fire risk assessments are carried out annually to identify any fire hazards in the building, identify the people who may be at risk from those hazards, evaluate the severity of the risk and determine any additional control measures that may be necessary. Where we are required to do so by the law, we will carry out any personal emergency evacuation plans.

There is a regime of testing and servicing to ensure that all fire safety measures are maintained in a workable condition. The Council's Facilities Team carries out weekly and monthly checks both internally and externally on communal areas. In summary, the following items are assessed:

- final exit door and internal fire doors
- lift and stairlifts
- emergency lighting
- smoke detector and fire alarm
- refuse collection
- walkways and paths
- furniture including sanitary and kitchen ware
- windows
- ventilation
- lights and sockets

- escape routes
- water flow, temperature and drainage.

Records of tests are held electronically, and audit checks are carried out on site on a quarterly basis by the Contract Compliance Officer. All defects and issues highlighted at testing will be rectified at that point and where not possible, reported to the Contracts Compliance Officer.

The following schedule is in place:

- Fire alarms – tested weekly, serviced annually
- Lifts and stairlifts – tested weekly, serviced quarterly
- Emergency lighting – tested monthly, serviced annually
- Fire extinguishers – serviced annually
- Inspections of premises – carried out weekly
- Smoke Control Systems – serviced annually.

Health and Safety

All Officers have had Health and Safety training (refreshed annually) and are aware of the importance of housekeeping.

Communal areas (internally and externally) are subject to regular inspections in order to ensure that Health and Safety measures are maintained. Records of such checks are held electronically. All defects and issues highlighted at inspections will be rectified at that point and where not possible reported to the Contracts Compliance Officer.

Health and Safety risk assessments are carried out annually to identify any hazards in the building, identify the people who may be at risk from those hazards, evaluate the severity of the risk and determine any additional control measures that may be necessary.

Building Compliance checks

The Housing Contracts Compliance Officer has oversight of all Health and Safety assessments, fire risk assessments, asbestos management surveys and where necessary the actions that follow. Records are reviewed monthly to ensure checks have been carried out and actions followed up.

The Contracts Compliance Officer also works closely with the facilities maintenance team to ensure legislation, regulations, guidance and the approved code of practice are adhered to.

Asbestos Management

All buildings built or refurbished before the year 2000 may contain asbestos. Across our portfolio all buildings have had an asbestos survey, have a management plan and reports in place with a copy displayed on site. The asbestos management plan is reviewed annually by competent persons in accordance with the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012

As Duty holders we are required to ensure that:

- reasonable steps are taken to find materials in premises likely to contain asbestos and to check their condition.
- materials are presumed to contain asbestos unless there is strong evidence that they do not.
- a written record of the location and condition of asbestos and/or presumed ACMs is made and that the record is kept up to date.
- the risk of anyone being exposed to these materials is assessed.
- a written plan to manage that risk is prepared and that the plan is put into effect to make sure that:
 - any material known or presumed to contain asbestos is kept in a good state of repair.
 - any material that contains or is presumed to contain asbestos is, because of the risks associated with its location or condition, repaired and adequately protected or if it is in a vulnerable position and cannot be adequately repaired or protected, it is removed.
- information on the location and condition of the material is given to anyone who is liable to disturb it or is otherwise potentially at risk.

All Officers have had asbestos awareness training (refreshed annually) in addition to this our Project Surveyor is P405 qualified. All are aware of the importance of reporting disturbed asbestos as a matter of urgency, whilst also ensuring access to the contaminated area is restricted until appropriate safety measures are taken.

Legionella Testing and Water Temperature Monitoring

By implementing appropriate control measures we ensure the risk of legionella bacteria breeding is low. For our domestic hot and cold-water systems, temperature monitoring is the most reliable way of ensuring the risk of exposure to Legionella bacteria is minimised i.e. keep the hot water hot, cold water cold and keep it moving. We also use other measures which help control the risk of exposure to Legionella including:

- flushing out the water systems weekly
- avoiding debris getting into the system (e.g. ensure the cold water tanks, where fitted, have a tight fitting lid)
- setting control parameters (e.g. setting the temperature of the hot water cylinder (calorifier) to ensure water is stored at 60°C)
- making sure any redundant pipework identified is removed.
- Monthly site maintenance visits & checks
- Water storage tank cleanse

All our water systems are monitored via 24hr networked surveillance of the water systems. Any irregularities are identified immediately and rectified by an engineer.

All records are stored electronically on our monitoring system/data base called Zetasafe.

Cleaning

We have a programme in place for weekly cleaning of communal stairs and corridors in all share houses, flats schemes (with communal areas) and community centres to

ensure that these areas meet an acceptable standard. This work is managed by our Facilities Team with an SLA in place setting out the responsibilities.

TV Aerials/satellite dishes

Individual property installations are the responsibility of the tenant. Where provided, communal aerials are service charged.

CCTV

The Council may choose to make use of Closed Circuit TV (CCTV) technology to help improve the management and security of tenants, leaseholders and visitors. Use of CCTV will be advertised in all areas where it is in use and steps will be made to ensure it is in line with our CCTV policy and meets data protection legislation. Footage from CCTV may be used as evidence in any legal proceedings.

Infestations

If an infestation occurs at a location that is identified as a common area and not part of a tenant's home, we will take steps to eradicate the infestation and prevent it from reoccurring. The response time for responding to infestations will depend on the type of infestations and the severity, however we will respond to all reports within 5 working days.

Maintenance and repairs

Maintenance and repairs are reviewed and reported as part of the Health and Safety and fire safety checks. All internal and external works on the community centres are included within the painting and general repairs programme. Additional repairs are carried out in line with our standard repair timeframes (set out in the Repairs and Fitness for Habitation Policy).

Last reviewed January 2023