

# L&Q Clear Communal Areas Policy

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## 1 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to help us manage our buildings safely and effectively. To achieve this, communal areas must be kept clear, safe, and easy for everyone to use. When personal items are left in these spaces, they can obstruct access and create risks for both residents and visitors.
- 1.2 The requirement to keep communal areas clear also forms part of each resident's tenancy or lease agreement. Maintaining clear communal areas helps reduce safety risks, including fire risks, and supports our responsibilities under fire safety legislation.

## 2 Scope and Exclusions

- 2.1 This policy applies to all communal areas within properties we own or manage, including blocks of flats occupied by tenants, shared owners and leaseholders.
- 2.2 Examples of communal areas include but are not limited to:
  - Corridors and walkways
  - Entrance ways and exits
  - Electrical cupboards and service risers
  - Stairs and landings
  - Bin and bike stores
  - Open walkways/ shared balconies
  - Meeting rooms (local arrangements may apply)
- 2.3 This policy also applies to shared and communal areas in our sheltered and supported living schemes. Examples of these areas include, but are not limited to, communal lounges, shared kitchens, and storerooms. Where specific exceptions apply, these will be set out within this policy or specified locally.
- 2.4 This policy does not cover our approach to the storage and disposal of abandoned goods in a resident's property either following the end of a tenancy, abandonment, or the death of a tenant or where the owner of the belongings cannot be identified. For more information on this, please see our Abandoned Goods Policy.

## 3 Legislation and Regulation

- 3.1 We always aim to meet our relevant legislative and regulatory obligations. Those relevant to this policy include, but are not limited to:

- **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety Order) 2005**

The Order requires the 'Responsible Person', typically the Landlord, Building Owner, or Managing Agent, to ensure that communal areas are kept clear and safe as part of a fire risk assessment, maintaining unobstructed escape routes and reducing fire hazards to protect occupants.

- **Housing Act 2004**

Under the Act, landlords must ensure communal areas are kept clear and safe as part of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), which assesses fire risks and requires unobstructed escape routes to protect residents.

- **Torts (Interference with Goods) Act 1977**

The Act required landlords to give notice and act fairly before selling or throwing away abandoned items.

- **Consumer Standards**

The Regulator of Social Housing sets Consumer Standards, which we are expected to meet. Our policies and processes are reviewed in line with such standards. For this policy we draw particular attention to the Safety and Quality Standard.

3.2 The requirements of this policy are also consistent with our tenancy agreement where residents commit to their responsibilities to keep communal areas clear.

## 4 Definitions

4.1 **Torts Notice-** a formal written notice under Torts (Interference with Goods) Act 1977, giving the owner a reasonable period to collect goods. It is used when items have been left behind or abandoned. The Notice informs the owner that their goods must be collected within a specified timeframe and explains that, if they are not collected, the landlord may sell or dispose of them.

4.2 **Flammable-** an item that can easily be set on fire. These items can include paper, clothing, bulk waste or rubbish bags.

4.3 **Fire Risk Assessment (FRA)-** a systematic process that identifies potential fire hazards, evaluates the risks associated with them, and implements measures to eliminate or reduce those risks to an acceptable level.

4.4 **Ignition-** the action of setting something on fire or starting to burn. Ignition sources can include batteries, motors and electrical items.

- 4.5 **Communal area**- refers to areas of a house or a block of flats or an estate that residents have a right to use in common, for example, means of access to and exit from their flats.
- 4.6 **Abandoned items**- The following are examples of where we consider goods to be abandoned:
- The tenancy has ended, and belongings remain in the home, garage, or outdoor areas within the property boundaries such as a garden or balcony.
  - Items are left in communal areas, and ownership cannot be established after reasonable enquiries.
  - There is reasonable evidence that the owner does not intend to collect the goods. The resident has passed away and no next of kin or representative claims the goods.
- For more information, please see our Abandoned Goods Policy.

## 5 Our Approach (zero-tolerance)

- 5.1 The build-up of flammable materials or ignition sources can significantly increase the risk of fire starting or growing. These items cause a fire to start or act as a fuel, making fires more severe and difficult to control.
- 5.2 Clutter can obstruct exits, hallways and windows, and make it harder for people to escape during a fire, especially if smoke is already making it difficult to see. This may also make it harder for firefighters trying to reach the fire to control it.
- 5.3 To keep your property safe, we operate a zero- tolerance approach in most of our properties. This means residents are not permitted to store, on a temporary or permanent basis, any personal items within the communal areas.
- 5.4 In all our buildings, bikes, electric bikes or electric scooters are not to be stored or charged in communal areas. They are to be stored in dedicated bike storage areas (if provided), kept outside the building, or within your own flat.
- 5.5 Mobility scooters are also not permitted to be either charged or stored within stairwells or communal areas.
- 5.6 Nothing should be suspended or hung from doors, communal walls, external balconies, ceilings, handrails or handrail infill boards. This includes laundry drying lines, door wreaths, any form of decorative items and plant containers.
- 5.7 Residents or visitors must never leave bags of rubbish, loose waste, cardboard etc in communal areas. All household waste, recycling, bulky items, and unwanted possessions must be disposed of correctly, and placed directly into the designated bins provided or taken to a recycling facility.

5.8 There may be some items in communal areas that L&Q have put in place, such as notice boards, signage, foyer planters, furniture or paintings on the walls. These items are permitted, and we will regularly inspect them during our fire risk assessment programme.

### 5.9 Door mats

Residents are usually permitted to have a suitable door mat at the entrance of their property. A suitable door mat must lay flat so there are no risks of slips and trips. Self-made, carpet off-cuts or door mats glued or taped to the floor are not suitable. If we assess a door mat to be unsuitable, you will be asked to remove it promptly.

## 6 Sheltered and Supported Living

6.1 Some differences apply in many of our sheltered and supported schemes. Such differences will have been risk-assessed, and are often due to the types of properties, or to accommodate to the needs of the residents. In many cases these sites may also have a regular staff presence.

6.2 Residents are not permitted to store, on a temporary or permanent basis, any personal items within the internal communal areas, cupboards or rooms which are not fully under their occupation under their tenancy agreement, lease, or contract.

6.3 Based on assessments of these properties, the following items may be permitted:

- One or two small pot plants outside of front doors. These must only contain soil and real plants/flowers and must not obstruct escape routes. If a plant pot is assessed as unsafe through inspection or an FRA, it must be removed.
- A door mat which lays flat (see 5.9)

6.4 In sheltered and supported schemes, mobility scooters must not be charged in communal corridors or stairwells. As part of our Fire Risk Assessment (FRA), we may identify specific areas within the building that are suitable solely for the safe charging and/or storage of mobility scooters. These areas may include:

- Unused rooms (for example, an old office, storeroom or meeting room)
- Communal rooms (such as lounges)

These spaces must not be used for general storage or for any items other than approved mobility scooters.

Local risk management arrangements may apply depending on the building.

6.5 Additional items may be allowed in certain communal areas if approved in writing by the person/team responsible for managing the building. Any approval may be withdrawn at any time.

- 6.6 In sheltered and supported living schemes, suitable items that support a comfortable and communal environment, such as additional furniture and furnishing, may be provided in lounges and kitchens. Any additional items are to be fire rate and any electrical items to be tested. If an FRA identifies them as inappropriate, they will not be permitted.

## 7 Removal of Goods

- 7.1 We will immediately remove and responsibly dispose of goods that pose a high risk, without prior notice. High-risk items include, but are not limited to:
- Fuel
  - Solvents (for example white spirit, acetone, petrol-based cleaners, or industrial cleaning chemicals)
  - Paints
  - Items blocking exits
- 7.2 If we urgently remove and dispose of an item, we will:
- Display a Torts Notice on the noticeboard, if the item was in a communal space or
  - Email residents to inform them of the action taken
- 7.3 For items do not pose an immediate risk, we will:
- Attach a Torts Notice to the item requesting removal within a specified period (typically 7 days)
  - Photograph the item with the notice attached
  - Deliver a Torts letter if the item was outside a specific property
  - Display a notice on the noticeboard or email residents if the item was left in a shared space
  - Send a notice to all residents on the floor if the item is in a corridor
- 7.4 If the owner has been identified and they do not remove the goods within the specified timeframe, the items will be treated as abandoned goods and we will proceed in line with the Abandoned Goods Policy (including removal, storage where applicable, and disposal).
- 7.5 Where a resident or their neighbour is away from home (for example, on holiday or visiting family) and they cannot remove belongings within the days specified on the notice, we will review the circumstances and risk on a case-by-case basis.

- 7.6 Where we haven't been able to identify the owner after making reasonable enquires, we may recharge the block or nearby properties through rent or service charges for the reasonable costs of removal, storage (where applicable), and disposal, in accordance with the Abandoned Goods Policy.
- 7.7 If a resident continues to leave waste or other items in communal areas after receiving warnings or reminders, we may consider this to be in breach of the tenancy or lease as well as this policy. We will take further action to address this issue, to reduce the risk to others.

## **8 Monitoring and Controls**

- 8.1 Regular FRAs will identify hazards in communal areas and actions will be completed promptly.
- 8.2 We will carry out routine inspections to ensure areas remain clear.
- 8.3 Residents can report hazards through customer service or online systems.
- 8.4 Obstructions will be logged and removed in line with policy, including use of TORT notices where appropriate.

## **9 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion**

- 9.1 We apply this policy consistently and in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. An Equality Impact Assessment was completed as part of this policy review.
- 9.2 To ensure compliance with fire safety regulation it is important that the requirement to keep communal areas clear. However, we recognise that some residents may face additional barriers in complying with the policy. Where appropriate, and where it is safe to do so, we may offer short-term, practical support to help residents meet the requirements of the policy. This does not remove the requirement to clear communal areas. Examples of support may include:
- Signposting to advice or support services
  - Providing information in accessible formats
  - Explaining notices and next steps verbally, through an interpreter or representative
- 9.3 Any support or flexibility provided will be proportionate, risk-assessed and time-limited, and will not be applied where there is an immediate fire or safety risk. If items are not removed within agreed timescales, we will take action in line with this policy.

## 10 Communications

- 10.1 This policy will be published on the L&Q website.
- 10.2 We will publish this policy internally for colleagues to access, along with associated procedures, processes and guidance.
- 10.3 Residents can report items left in a communal area by contacting our Customer Service Team.
- 10.4 Complaints regarding the application of this policy, will be managed in line with our Complaints Policy.

## 11 Policy controls sheet

**Date of approval:** 21/04/26

**Approved by:** Customer Group

**Effective date:** 21/04/26

**Next Review date:** 21/04/29

**Policy owned by:** Director of Housing Management

**Associated documents:** Abandoned Goods Policy, Fire Safety Policy

Main change	Key points
Introduction of a new Clear Communal Areas Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Outlining our existing approach to items left in communal areas in a standalone policy. This position was previously covered in our Estate Management Policy.</li></ul>
Reviewed by: The Policy Team	
Approved by: Customer Group	