



SP20 – Estates and Communal Areas Policy

Scope of policy

This policy outlines Soha's approach to the design, maintenance, cleaning, management and improvement of neighbourhoods and communal areas in general needs (independent living and retirement living accommodation). For the purpose of this policy, communal areas refer to shared parts of land and buildings managed by Soha, which are not the responsibility of residents, leaseholders or shared owners to maintain.

Communal areas can be either internal or external, including entrance lobbies, landings, stairwells, all cupboards (outside of flats, including meter cupboards, riser cupboards, electrical intake cupboards and landlord cupboards), lifts, open walkways all balconies, external façade, green spaces, bin and bike stores.

This policy applies to all tenures within Soha including leaseholders and shared owners.

Aim

Soha aims to provide our residents with quality homes and communities. This includes having clean, well-maintained and attractive neighbourhoods. We will work closely with residents and other stakeholders to achieve this.

Soha aims to provide an excellent and cost-effective maintenance and cleaning service for grounds and other communal areas which meets residents' expectations for the area in which they live. Soha ensures the health and safety of residents and their visitors, staff, contractors, and anyone else who comes into our properties, and to prevent any accumulation of items in communal areas that could contribute to a fire risk or hamper safe evacuation in the event of an emergency.

Policy Statement

Soha recognises the importance of a good living environment in improving and maintaining communities where people want to live. Soha has a Safer, Cleaner, Greener approach to improving and maintaining our neighbourhoods. Communal areas will receive regular cleaning services and grounds maintenance in line with Soha's service standards.

To ensure compliance with legislation and to keep our residents safe, Soha takes a zero-tolerance approach to items being stored within communal areas in general needs blocks. In independent living or extra care schemes, only items placed in communal areas by Soha will be permitted.

Soha will inspect its blocks, estates, independent living and retirement living schemes regularly to ensure they remain clean, tidy and in good condition and to ensure services are being delivered effectively and in accordance with contract specifications. Residents will be invited to accompany staff on these inspections. The appropriate action will be taken to address any areas identified as requiring improvement during these inspections e.g. untidy gardens, contractor underperformance, fire hazards identified etc. Schedules, job reports and records of quality checks are not proactively provided though are available on request to the Estates team.

We aim to apply this policy consistently and fairly and will not discriminate on grounds of race, colour, ethnic or national origins, religion, sexual orientation, disability, gender, age or any other matter which may cause a person to be treated with injustice.

Implementation

General Needs Blocks of Flats, Independent Living & Extra Care Schemes

Communal Areas (corridors/lobbies etc)

Residents cannot store items in communal areas. Items include, but not limited to:

- Soft furnishings, clothing, footwear, or any other combustible items.
- Carpet
- Rubbish
- Pot plants - real or imitation
- Door wreaths & fairy lights
- Pictures (it may be possible to display a picture if securely fixed to the wall as opposed to hung with string - in all cases permission must be sought before affixing any item to a communal wall).
- Any item of furniture, ornaments, bicycles, pushchairs, car seats, boxes or any other such article.
- E-scooters, e-bikes and electric mobility aids are not permitted to be stored or charged in communal areas. (Also see SP62 E-vehicle and SP65 E-scooter & E-bike Policies)
- No electrical items.
- Any items that contain fuel (even if empty).

Communal Cupboards

Communal cupboards opening onto or located within common escape routes may only be used where the fire risk assessment confirms that their presence and use are acceptable. Use of the cupboard for storage remains at Soha's discretion and is not a right of tenancy. Such cupboards must meet all of the following requirements:

- they are purpose-built, enclosed in fire-resisting construction, and fitted with a suitable fire-resisting self-closing door;
- they do not contain gas installations, electrical intake equipment, meters, fuseboards, consumer units, service pipework, or other building services;
- they are not riser cupboards or service shafts;

- they are used only for authorised, low-risk storage and are kept free from combustible, flammable, or hazardous materials;
- residents must not store any ignition source, charging equipment, lithium-ion battery, e-bike, e-scooter, mobility scooter, or any item containing a rechargeable battery in the cupboard;
- the cupboard must be kept locked shut when not in use, where this forms part of the fire risk control measures;
- the cupboard and its use must be subject to regular inspection and management control, with any inappropriate storage removed without delay.

Independent Living & Extra Care Schemes Only

Furniture and other items within communal lounges and communal areas are only permitted if they have been supplied by Soha. Any items that are not compliant will be removed as per the TORT process.

Any items found in the communal areas or landlord cupboards that do not comply with the above criteria will be subject to the TORT process, as below.

Removal and disposal of items (TORT process)

If items are found in communal areas and the owner can be readily identified, a Tort Notice will be placed on the item and posted to the property of the owner informing that the items must be removed within 7 days. If we are unable to identify the owner, a TORT notice will be posted on the communal notice board.

At the end of the Tort Notice period, the items will be removed and placed in storage for 28 days. At the end of the specified time period, if the owner has not been identified, items will be disposed of in accordance with [The Torts \(Interference with Goods\) Act 1977](#).

Soha reserves the right to charge for the storage and disposal of any goods removed to the owner or through the service charge if the owner is unidentifiable. Soha will not be liable for the cost of any unclaimed items once they have been disposed of, and no compensation will be payable. Soha does not accept any liability for items removed during transit and storage.

Any items found that pose a serious imminent risk will be removed immediately e.g. fuel cans, adapted e-bikes and scooters

See the Communal areas procedure.

Estate Inspections

Soha will inspect its estates, independent living and retirement living schemes regularly to ensure they remain clean, tidy and in good condition and to ensure services are being delivered effectively and in accordance with contract specifications. The appropriate action will be taken to address any areas identified as requiring improvement during these inspections e.g. untidy gardens, contractor underperformance, fire hazards identified etc.

Fly-tipping & Misuse of Bin Stores

Fly-tipping is the illegal dumping of waste and is considered anti-social behaviour as well as a criminal offence. This includes placing bulky items in bin stores or leaving items not accepted as part of the local authority's waste collection service. Fly-tipped materials may include both commercial waste (such as building materials, vehicle parts, and tyres) and domestic items (such as mattresses, refrigerators, and washing machines).

We will arrange for the prompt removal of any waste left from Soha land, including communal areas.

Where we can identify the individual responsible, we will recharge them in full for the cost of clearing the waste. Where the responsible party cannot be identified, the cost of removal will be recharged to the relevant block or scheme.

In locations identified as fly-tipping 'hot spots', Estate Officers will work in partnership with Neighbourhood Officers and any relevant external services e.g. Waste enforcement Officers; to deliver targeted improvements, education and aims to reduce occurrences.

Repeated offences may be treated as a breach of a tenancy agreement and result in formal action.

Untaxed/ SORN/ Abandoned Vehicles

If a vehicle such as a car, van or motorbike is found to be untaxed, SORN or appears abandoned on Soha land, an officer will place a notice to the vehicle giving a timeframe for it to be removed or made roadworthy.

If the owner has not been identified and the vehicle is not removed, our Estates Team will liaise with the local authority to make arrangements for its removal.

Estate and Neighbourhood Surveys

Soha will undertake an annual satisfaction survey on all its estates and neighbourhoods. The results will be fed back to residents and will be used to improve the estate services we provide and the appearance of our estates.

Trees on Communal Land

Soha will commission a tree condition survey every four years. The survey will be undertaken by a qualified arborist and will include the inspection of all trees on communal land owned by Soha. The purpose of the survey is to confirm the condition of all trees and produce a detailed report which prioritises any work found to be required. The tree condition report will enable Soha to create a four-year tree maintenance programme. Any emergency tree work will be completed immediately; the remaining work will be completed in priority order. Any ad-hoc work requested or identified by staff, residents etc. in addition to the work included in the tree condition report will be individually assessed by a qualified arborist. As above any work found to be required will be prioritised.

Refer to Soha's Tree Management Policy (SP48) for further information and guidance.

Community Action Plans

Each year Soha will use the estate inspections and survey results to identify Community Action Plan projects, subject to appropriate budget approval. A programme of work with a focus on housing management, physical improvements and resident involvement activities will be agreed with residents and delivered within a set timeframe. Resident surveys will be carried out to assess the impact of the work undertaken.

Tenant Estate Improvements

An additional, smaller annual budget is delegated to the Members Forum and administered by the Estate Portfolio Holders. This budget is spent on estate improvements specifically requested by residents.

Resident Involvement

Soha invites residents to join staff in the monthly estate walkabouts.

Soha consults with residents regarding service standards and specifications prior to tendering estate maintenance contracts. Soha consults with residents ahead of carrying out any estate improvement work. Soha residents are invited to join the contractor selection panel that is responsible for choosing our estate maintenance contractors.

Dissatisfaction with Service

Residents can raise initial dissatisfaction with the service with the Estates team. If they remain dissatisfied, they can follow Soha's complaints procedure. Consideration will be given to legal requirements and Soha's safety first approach when investigating complaints regarding communal areas.

Responsibility

The Director of Property Services is responsible for the effective implementation of this policy.

Monitoring and review

Soha will carry out an annual resident estate satisfaction survey. Soha will carry out periodic inspections using a risk-based approach to assess the general condition of our estates and the performance of our estate maintenance contractors.

Inspection and survey results will be shared with Residents, Contractors and Soha's Board. Soha will consult with residents ahead of implementing any new estate policy or drafting any new estate maintenance contract.

Context

Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (as amended by Fire Safety Act 2021);
The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022; and The Building Safety Act 2022
Housing Act 2004
Torts (interference with Goods) Act 1977
Commonhold and Leasehold reform Act 2002

The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/making-your-small-block-of-flats-safe-from-fire/a-guide-to-making-your-small-block-of-flats-safe-from-fire-accessible>

SP62 – E-vehicles Policy

SP65 – E-scooter & E-bike Policy

SP48 – Tree Management Policy

Consumer Standards

Safety & Quality Standard - 1.3 Health and safety

1.3.1 When acting as landlords, registered providers must take all reasonable steps to ensure the health and safety of residents in their homes and associated communal areas.

Community Standard - 1.1 Safety of shared spaces

1.1.1 Registered providers must work co-operatively with residents, other landlords and relevant organisations to take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety of shared space

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DPIA Checklist completed	1 June 2026		