

Crawley Homes Fire Policy for Enclosed blocks of flats

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order (the FSO) came into force in 2006. It brought common, or communal, areas in blocks of flats into mainstream fire safety legislation.

This policy addresses the Crawley Homes enclosed low-rise general needs flats. The definition of an enclosed block of flats is a flat with one or more internal staircases. A common or communal area is the hall, stairs of landings in a flat.

Crawley Homes have developed separate detailed fire safety policies (covering evacuation procedures and fire safety equipment) for integral sheltered housing schemes (Fairlawn, Halfacres Schaffer House and Carey House), hostels, Milton Mount and Brunel Court because these buildings have specific fire safety requirements.

The approach to keeping communal areas clear at all Crawley Homes enclosed flats, including integral and dispersed sheltered housing schemes, Milton Mount and Brunel Court, is set out in this policy in Appendix 1. Procedures for keeping communal areas clear in hostels are set out in the fire safety policy for hostels.

Flats with open communal areas, which are often only two levels, are not covered by this policy and do not have a specific fire policy. They are deemed low fire risk due to their structure and size.

1. Fire Risk Assessments

Fire risk assessments for the communal areas at Crawley Homes enclosed blocks of flats are carried out on a five-year cycle. Each year twenty per cent of the stock is checked. Risk assessments are currently carried out by Fire Risk UK, on behalf of Crawley Homes.

More frequent fire risk assessments are carried out at for all sheltered housing schemes, hostels, Milton Mount and Brunel Court, as they have specific fire safety requirements.

The risk assessments cover prevention as well as escape. An action plan is produced when required for any findings. Actions are recorded in the Council's Electronic Information Management system and passed on to the relevant team(s) to carry out.

The fire risk assessment will be also be reviewed

- After material alterations
- After a fire
- After significant works to address FRA short comings
- After changes in regulation or general fire safety practice

Currently no fire risk assessments are undertaken for flats with open communal areas. Due to their structure and size they are deemed low risk in relation to fire.

2. Prevention

The following measures have been put in place by Crawley Homes in order to prevent fire in enclosed flats:

- No smoking signage
In place in the communal area in every enclosed block of flats.

Revised policy - policy reviewed April 2017. Minor amends January 2018.

- Security (reduce arson risk)

An entrance door, which in some flats includes a door entry system, reduces the risk of arson.

- Keeping communal areas free of combustible material

See Appendix 1 of this policy for detail on this procedure.

- Electrical testing

Electrical testing is carried out every five years. Emergency lighting in all communal areas has an annual full discharge test and a six-month operational test.

- Evacuation procedures

Evacuation procedures are displayed in the communal area of every enclosed block of flats.

- Fire risk assessments

Fire risk assessments are carried out at regular intervals, see above.

- Crawley Homes staff

Crawley Homes staff to be vigilant when visiting flats and report any concerns.

3. Keeping communal areas clear of combustible material

Crawley Homes have adopted a zero tolerance approach for all general needs enclosed blocks of flats, including Milton Mount, Brunel Court and integral and dispersed sheltered schemes. This means that communal area should be kept clear of all items at all times.

Our tenancy agreement states:-

“Common areas must be kept clear to enable emergency evacuation. If your home is a flat or maisonette you must not cause an obstruction in any of the common areas by leaving prams, pushchairs, bicycles, power scooters or other devices used to aid mobility, domestic appliances, furniture, floor coverings, rubbish or any other objects there. You are responsible for contacting the Council immediately if you become aware of any such obstruction. Common areas remain Council property and the Council may remove any objects found there. If the Council removes one or more items of your personal property that are obstructing common areas, you must pay for the cost of the removal.”

Our standard lease contains the clause:

To keep all passages staircases and other communal areas in the property clear of obstruction of any kind”

Crawley Homes regularly informs residents about their responsibility for keeping the communal areas clear and that items left in the communal areas may be removed and destroyed. Tenants will receive this information annually with their rent increase letters and Leaseholders will receive this information annually with the April bills.

The procedure for keeping common areas clear can be found in Appendix 1.

Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed every five years. The next review is due April 2022

Appendix 1 Procedure for keeping communal areas clear

The approach for keeping the communal areas clear is set out below. It applies to all general needs enclosed blocks of flats, including Milton Mount, Brunel Court and integral and dispersed sheltered schemes.

The procedure for maintaining a 'zero tolerance' approach is:

1. Identification of item and its owner
 - Items will be identified by the Mobile Cleaning team when they are on the premises and by other officers about the estate. Enquiries will be made by door knocking at the time. Where we make contact with the owners of the items they will be instructed to remove the items immediately.
 - Where we cannot identify the owner at the time, or when residents report items left in communal areas, we will attempt to ascertain who owns the item and instruct the owner to remove them immediately. If unsuccessful, a clearance sheet will be raised to have the items removed.
 - For persistent cases a Fixed Penalty Notice or Community Protection notice are options to peruse, though this process takes time so will be used sparingly.
2. Removal and/ or storage
 - Where officers decide disposal of items would impact on a tenant's ability to travel e.g. buggies adult bicycles, these will be stored for a period of 28 days before being disposed of. This will be a very limited number of items.
 - All other items, with the exception of disability aids, will be disposed of without storage.
3. Recharging for removal/storage/collection
 - A fee can be charged via the Councils recharge policy for removal if the owner has been identified and not removed the item themselves, or if the owner is identified at a later point. Consideration can be given to applying removal charge via the service charge where there is persistent infringement of the policy.
 - Charging a fee for removal will discourage repeat offending. This could be a discretionary charge.
4. Disposal of property
 - Property not claimed after 28 days will be disposed of.