

# Communal areas and private balcony storage policy

May 2025

Housing  
Management



THE ROYAL BOROUGH OF  
KENSINGTON  
AND CHELSEA

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1 **CONTENTS**

1 **CONTENTS** ..... 2

2 **Introduction** ..... 3

3 **Related documents** ..... 3

4 **Legal context** ..... 3

5 **Policy Statement and Managed Approach** ..... 4

6 **Communal areas** ..... 6

7 **Items not allowed in communal areas** ..... 8

8 **Private balconies** ..... 9

9 **Monitoring and Enforcement** ..... 10

10 **Residents Responsibilities and Involvement** ..... 11

11 **Equalities Statement** ..... 12

12 **The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act 2018** ..... 13

13 **Compliance, Monitoring and Review** ..... 13

## **2 Introduction**

- 2.1 The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Housing Management (RBKC HM) have duties to manage fire safety in common areas of our residential buildings.
- 2.2 RBKC has a legal duty to make sure that all fire escapes and fire routes are kept clear at all times. It is important that residents keep communal areas free from any obstruction or fire risk
- 2.3 This policy sets out RBKC Housing Management's approach to manage fire safety risks in communal and private balcony areas, specifically in terms of housekeeping standards.
- 2.4 The purpose of this policy is to provide clear standards to support effective management of common areas for the safety of residents and other users of the buildings. Housing Management is committed to a high level of cleanliness and standard on its estates and will act appropriately to remove any items from communal areas in order to encourage responsible storage/disposal of items and discourage fly tipping and similar practices.
- 2.5 RBKC Housing Management will, as part of our commitment to fire safety within communal areas, regularly monitor these areas by carrying out estate inspections in order to:
- Report and deal with any issues which could be a risk to health and safety such as trip hazards or obstructions of fire access routes.
  - Report on fly tipping, dumped or abandoned items
- 2.6 RBKC HM recognise the value that positive ambience brings to peoples' lives and wellbeing. In formulating this policy, RBKC has given consideration to ensuring the safety of our buildings whilst maintaining common areas in a reasonable and proportionate manner, ensuring that the quality of our residents' homes is upheld.

## **3 Related documents**

- 3.1 This policy should be read in conjunction with the following Council policies, procedures and documents:
- Mobility Scooter, E-bike and E-scooter Policy
  - Fire Safety Policy
  - RBKC Tenancy Agreement
  - Tenant Handbook
  - ASB Policy
  - Fire Safety Handbook

## **4 Legal context**

- 4.1 The key regulation around the prevention of fire in residential buildings includes:
- The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

- The Housing Act 2004, which introduces the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)
- Electrical Equipment (Safety and Use) Regulations 1994
- Furniture and Furnishings (Fire Safety) Regulations 1988 (as amended in 1989, 1993 and 2010)
- The Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974
- Building Safety Act 2022
- The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health 2002
- Social Housing Act 2023

4.2 In support of legislation, there are various supporting guides which have been considered in the formulation of this Policy. These include:

- Fire safety in purpose-built flats by Local Government Association
- Housing – Fire Safety by LACORS
- Fire safety in specialised housing by the National Fire Chiefs Council

## 5 **Policy Statement and Managed Approach**

5.1 RBKC HM is committed to maintaining the safety, security, and accessibility of all communal areas and private balconies in its residential buildings. This policy establishes a clear framework to achieve these objectives while balancing the practical needs and well-being of residents.

### 5.2 **Policy Objectives**

5.2.1 RBKC HM aims to:

- **Ensure Clear Access Routes:** Maintain unobstructed pathways and emergency exits to facilitate safe evacuation during emergencies.
- **Minimise Fire Risks:** Prevent the storage of hazardous or flammable materials in communal areas and private balconies.
- **Promote Resident Well-being:** Allow specific personal items in shared spaces under controlled conditions to enhance the living environment without compromising safety.

### 5.3 **Managed Approach**

5.4 RBKC HM adopts a 'managed approach' to communal areas and private balconies, ensuring a balance between safety, accessibility, and practicality.

5.5 The approach is guided by the following principles:

#### 1. **Dynamic Risk Assessments:**

- Conduct regular inspections to identify potential hazards and assess the suitability of items in communal areas and balconies.
- Consider building-specific factors such as occupancy levels, fire safety infrastructure, and materials' combustibility.

- RBKC Housing Management will discuss health and safety and fire safety issues and risks for communal areas, to ensure a dynamic risk assessment is taking place. The teams involved will include:
  - Neighbourhood Management Teams
  - Estate and Environmental Services Team
  - Fire, Health and Safety Team
  - Aids and Adaptations Team
  - Home Ownership Team

## 2. Permitted Items:

- Allow specific items that meet safety criteria, such as non-combustible decorative plants or purpose-made furniture, under defined conditions. (minimum of 1m clearance on a balcony, walkway and/or must not protrude into a communal area)
- Prohibit items that pose significant fire risks, obstruct escape routes, or violate aesthetic standards.

## 3. Adaptable Policies:

- Modify rules based on inspection outcomes, changes in resident behaviour, or emerging risks.
- Implement stricter measures, such as a 'zero tolerance' policy, where necessary to ensure safety.

## 4. Communication and Support:

- Clearly communicate the policy to residents and provide guidance on compliance.
- Offer support and alternative solutions for residents requiring reasonable adjustments, such as mobility aids.

## 5.6 Implementation

- **Inspection Procedures:** Scheduled and unscheduled inspections will be conducted to ensure compliance with the policy.
- **Enforcement Protocols:** Non-compliant items will be removed, with potential cost recovery for residents. Repeated violations may result in further enforcement actions, including legal measures.
- **Resident Engagement:** RBKC HM will engage residents through notices, meetings, and written communications to ensure understanding and cooperation.

5.7 By adhering to this combined framework, RBKC HM and residents collectively ensure that communal areas and private balconies remain safe, accessible, and conducive to a positive living environment.

## **6 Communal areas**

6.1 RBKC Housing Management will ensure that communal areas are used in the correct way for the benefit of residents, visitors, staff and emergency services.

6.2 For the purposes of this policy, communal areas include approach balconies serving multiple flats, corridors, landings, stairs, cupboards for use by multiple residents or contractors, etc., under stair areas as well as external areas forming part of the common facilities or escape routes for the building.

6.3 Where RBKC has communal facilities in residential buildings (i.e. resident lounges, laundry facilities and kitchen areas etc.), we will manage these appropriately by carrying out portable appliance testing to items within these areas, where required. Residents using these facilities should ensure that the areas are used appropriately, including:

- Keeping fire exits and emergency routes clear from any obstructions
- Using appliances and kitchen facilities in accordance with relevant instructions

6.4 RBKC Housing Management will undertake regular inspections of communal facilities and carry out any corrective actions that may be required.

6.5 There are some key principles which must be followed by residents for communal areas:

- Any items introduced under the 'managed policy' must not obstruct routes in such a way that prevents wheelchair user access. This means that a 1m width (or the existing corridor width, where the width is less than 1m) should be maintained at all times.
- Any items introduced under the 'managed policy' must not compromise either escape or fire-fighting activities or obstruct any fire-fighting equipment at any time.
- Any items introduced under the 'managed policy' should not cause damage to the existing building fabric.
- Any items introduced under the 'managed policy' must not increase the fire risk.

## **6.6 Permitted items (all blocks)**

6.6.1 The following items are permitted in communal areas (excluding stairways):

- A purpose-made doormat can be placed outside a resident's front door. The doormat should be in good / reasonable condition, non-slip, should not be made from offcuts of carpet or similar materials and should not cause an obstruction to anyone.
- Wall-mounted painting(s), that must be fully covered with a glass front securely fixed in the frame.

- Mirrors (located in a way that does not reflect direct sunlight).
- Decorative plants / flowers, provided that:
  - They are provided in pots and made of limited combustibility materials (i.e. pots must not be plastic and must only be metal, ceramic, clay, etc.).
  - The plants are not artificial (i.e. only real plants or flowers allowed).
  - The plants are kept alive and watered, in soil, at all times.
  - The plants are located in a way that does not cause any obstruction to either residents (in the course of escape) or fire-fighters (in the course of fire-fighting activities).
  - The plants are not mounted in a way that poses a head-height hazard, or that causes any damage to any wall, door or surface.
  - The plants, when watered, do not cause a slip hazard. (plant pots must allow a minimum of 1m clearance on a balcony or walkway and/or must not protrude into the communal area by more than **50cms** and must be adjacent to the residents own front door unless it has been agreed by neighbouring residents to take a community approach. E.g. potted plants on shared communal areas).

## 6.7 Allowances for reasonable adjustments

6.7.1 Where a building has a vulnerable or disabled resident, who has difficulty with, for example, mobility, additional allowances can be made to provide a non-combustible chair (for the purposes of comfortable waiting for the lift car to arrive), or for a small, suitably located stool or chair formed of limited combustibility materials. These requests will be assessed and agreed by RBKC on a case-by-case basis.

## 6.8 Allowances for bicycles

6.8.1 In some blocks, where storage of bicycles can be safely achieved in accordance with the principles set out in Clause 6.5, it may be permissible to store a bicycle, providing it is secured and will not topple over or excessively move during escape or firefighting. This is on the basis of a lower fire risk associated with bicycles. Residents can discuss bicycle storage with RBKC if there are any queries regarding this Clause.

6.8.2 No other item is permissible in communal areas unless written permission is given by RBKC Housing Management.

6.8.3 RBKC HM recognises the growing popularity of electric bikes (E-bikes) and electric scooters (E-scooters) as sustainable modes of transport. However, due to safety, regulatory, and insurance concerns, E-bikes and E-scooters are not permitted for use, storage, or charging within any communal areas. If you do plan on using e-bikes or e-scooters,

6.8.4 Residents must not store, park or charge their e-bike, e-scooter or motorised vehicle in communal areas.

- 6.8.5 Residents are required to park e-bikes, e-scooters or other motorised vehicles appropriately in designated parking places. They should not be stored, parked or left in communal areas.
- 6.8.6 Residents who purchase e-bikes, e-scooters or other motorised vehicles, should be aware that it is not appropriate to take these devices into lifts, as there are recognised fire hazards associated with these items which would create an unacceptable risk within a lift.
- 6.8.7 If a resident decides to purchase an e-scooter or other motorised vehicle, they are responsible for its safety, including safety whilst charging within their home. The Council advises residents to avoid these types of transport due to the hazard that they present and advise residents to use public hire e-scooters, should they wish to travel in this way (again for which residents are responsible for ensuring all relevant highway laws are adhered to). Please refer to the Mobility Scooter, E-bike and E-Scooter Policy for more guidance.

## **7 Items not allowed in communal areas**

- 7.1 Below is a list of common items found in communal areas that are not permissible under any circumstances:
- Prams or push chairs
  - Refuse/black bags
  - Naked flames or burning of any kind e.g. candles or incense sticks
  - Mobility scooters
  - Electric bikes/scooters
  - Mopeds
  - Bags and boxes of old clothes or newspapers
  - Combustible furniture (other than those permitted in accordance with Clauses 6.5 and 6.6 of this Policy)
  - White goods (whether awaiting disposal or not)
  - Seasonal items – e.g. decorations
  - Canvas and textile-based artwork or unframed / uncovered pictures
  - Shoe racks
  - Charging of any electrical devices/tools
- 7.2 Residents are encouraged to contact RBKC HM, if they have any queries or require advice on general health and safety in communal areas or storage on private balconies.
- 7.3 RBKC Housing Management will provide advice and support to residents on matters relating to communal areas, where needed.
- 7.4 Whilst RBKC Housing Management appreciates the role that mobility scooters can play in maintaining independence for residents who need to use them, it has a duty to consider the health and safety of all building users.

- 7.5 Where RBKC Housing Management becomes aware of a mobility scooter being stored or charged in communal areas, arrangements will be made to have it removed due to the increased fire risk, health and safety risks and obstruction hazards posed. Where possible, Neighbourhood Management Teams will contact and work with residents to find alternative arrangements for their mobility scooters. (Refer to Mobility Scooter, E-bike and e-scooter Policy)
- 7.6 Neighbourhood Management Teams will work with Health and Safety, Supported Housing, Aids and Adaptations, Estate Services and other internal/external support services, where required if residents may have additional storage needs in relation to accessibility.
- 7.7 Residents are encouraged to report any non-permitted items in communal areas to RBKC Housing Management on 0800 137 111 or email: [HM-CustomerServices@rbkc.gov.uk](mailto:HM-CustomerServices@rbkc.gov.uk).
- 7.8 RBKC Housing Management will ensure that any abandoned goods are disposed of or removed in order to prevent risk to residents.
- 7.9 Neighbourhood Management Teams will review communal area storage issues, where appropriate.

## **8 Private balconies**

8.1 Where lower ground floor or ground floor dwellings exist, walkways, rear gardens and front patios should be treated as a private balcony.

### **8.2 Allowable items**

8.2.1 The following items are permitted in private balcony areas:

- Metal (or thick timber) framed tables and chairs.
- Clothes-line - clothes must not over-hang balcony railings and must be placed as close to balcony doors as possible. There have been incidents of cigarette ends being thrown from other balconies presenting a fire risk.
- Plants/flowers that do not pose a hazard of falling and are kept watered, and alive in pots made of limited combustibility materials.

### **8.3 Items not allowed on private balconies**

8.3.1 The following items present a hazard and are not permitted:

- Gas canisters, barbecues or patio heaters
- Fuel, petrol or sources of ignition of any kind (or any equipment powered by fuel e.g. generators or gardening equipment)
- Trailing cables, sockets or electrical white goods
- Paints, oils or paint thinners
- Excessive furniture or items cluttering the balcony
- Plastic or upholstered furniture
- Loose plant pots / plant pots placed insecurely on ledges

- Curtaining or enclosing of the balcony on any side i.e. bamboo screens
- Gating off any communal area or balcony
- Gazebos, tents and sheds – if they cannot be sited more than six metres away from any RBKC building perimeter. There have been incidents of fires caused by carelessly discarded smoking materials fueled by garden structures in the past.
- Shisha pipes or other smokeable water pipes (Charcoal based)
- Washing machines / Dryers
- E vehicles / bikes / scooters
- Portable heaters / Domestic heating appliance

*The above lists are not exhaustive. Other items may be considered as unsuitable or unsafe at the discretion of the RBKC.*

8.3.2 Barbeques are not permitted within RBKC communal areas or private balconies, and we would recommend contacting RBKC Housing Management if you would further information about where you can safely have a barbeque on your estate.

8.3.3 As per the tenant handbook which states '*Many fires start on balconies, and these can be easily prevented. Balcony fires can spread to inside your flat, so it is important that you keep your balcony free from storage and never cook or have a barbeque on it. If you smoke on your balcony, please do not throw your cigarette over the balcony. Extinguish it fully in an ashtray before disposing of it in a bin.*

8.3.4 There may be instances where site specific risks require a more stringent approach in certain blocks of flats. Where residents have any queries about the suitability of storing items in communal or balcony areas, they should seek advice and/or written permission from RBKC Housing Management.

## **9 Monitoring and Enforcement**

9.1 RBKC Housing Management (RBKC HM) implements a structured approach to monitoring and enforcing compliance with this policy, ensuring communal areas and private balconies remain safe and accessible for all residents.

### **9.2 Monitoring**

- **Regular Inspections:** Scheduled and unscheduled inspections will be conducted to identify hazards and non-compliance.
- **Documentation:** Detailed records will be maintained for each inspection, including dates, identified issues, and follow-up actions.

### **9.3 Enforcement Protocols**

#### **1. Issuing Warnings:**

- **First Warning:** Verbal notification to residents identifying the issue and providing clear guidance on corrective actions.
- **Second Warning:** Written notification with a specific deadline for compliance.

- **Final Warning:** Formal written notice outlining penalties for continued non-compliance.

## 2. Penalties and Corrective Actions:

- **Removal of Items:** Unauthorised or hazardous items will be removed, with residents notified in advance where possible.
- **Cost Recovery:** Residents may be charged for the costs associated with item removal, storage, or disposal.
- **Escalation:** Persistent or severe violations may result in legal action, in accordance with the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

## 3. Support Measures:

- **Guidance and Education:** RBKC HM will provide residents with advice on safe storage practices and compliance requirements.
- **Reasonable Adjustments:** Additional allowances or alternative solutions will be considered for residents with specific needs, such as those with mobility challenges.
- **Consultation:** Residents can request clarification or assistance by contacting RBKC HM through designated channels.

### 9.4 Collaboration with Authorities

- 9.4.1 RBKC HM will work with the London Fire Brigade and other relevant bodies to ensure compliance with fire safety standards and address significant hazards.

### 9.5 Continuous Improvement

- **Policy Review:** This policy will be reviewed regularly to reflect updates in legislation, best practices, and resident feedback.
- **Resident Input:** RBKC HM will encourage residents to share feedback on the monitoring and enforcement process to improve fairness and effectiveness.

- 9.6 By adhering to these protocols, RBKC HM ensures a transparent, supportive, and effective approach to maintaining safe communal spaces and private balcony areas.

## 10 Residents Responsibilities and Involvement

- 10.1 Residents play a vital role in maintaining the safety, cleanliness, and accessibility of communal areas and private balconies. To ensure shared responsibility, residents are expected to:

- **Keep Communal Areas Clear:** Ensure that all shared spaces, including corridors, stairwells, and landings, are free from personal items or obstructions. This practice supports safe evacuation routes and facilitates effective cleaning and maintenance.
- **Properly Store Personal Belongings:** Avoid storing personal items in communal areas. All belongings should be kept within individual apartments or in designated storage spaces to maintain communal aesthetics and prevent hazards.

- **Adhere to Fire Safety Regulations:** Do not store flammable materials, such as gas bottles, fuels, or flammable liquids, in communal areas or on private balconies. Do not paint any communal walls and avoid penetrating walls with nails or drilling into walls, to hang pictures/wall ornaments. These precautions minimise fire risks and align with fire safety guidelines. For the safety of everyone within the building, building safety signage should not be covered or tampered with.
- **Respect Smoking Policies:** Comply with no-smoking regulations in communal areas to uphold health standards and reduce fire hazards.
- **Report Hazards Promptly:** Inform RBKC Housing Management of any safety issues or obstructions in communal areas or private balconies as soon as they are identified. Prompt reporting helps to ensure timely resolution and enhances overall safety.

## 10.2 **Supporting Communication and Involvement Strategies**

10.2.1 RBKC HM is committed to actively engaging residents and supporting them in fulfilling their responsibilities through the following initiatives:

- **Regular Updates:** Quarterly newsletters and updates via email or the resident portal to keep residents informed about responsibilities, common safety issues, and policy changes.
- **Resident Meetings:** Annual or biannual meetings, both in-person and virtual, to discuss safety concerns, policy updates, and gather resident feedback. Neighbourhood team also have regular drop-in sessions for residents to attend if required.
- **Awareness Materials:** Accessible guides, brochures, and digital FAQs outlining acceptable and prohibited items, as well as tips for maintaining safe and compliant spaces.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Fire safety initiatives to promote hazard-free balconies and communal areas.
- **Consultation Opportunities:** Provide structured opportunities for residents to contribute to policy updates and share feedback on implementation, ensuring that their voices are heard in decision-making processes.

## 11 **Equalities Statement**

11.1 The Council is committed to promoting fair and equal access to services and equal opportunities in employment, the procurement of goods and as a community leader. The Council's policies, procedures and day to day practices have been established to promote an environment which is free from unlawful and unfair discrimination, while valuing the diversity of all people.

11.2 Discrimination on the grounds of race, nationality, ethnic origin, religion or belief, gender, marital status, sexuality, disability and age is not acceptable: the Council will take action to ensure no person using the council's premises or services receives less favourable treatment or is disadvantaged by requirements or conditions that cannot be justified. The Council will tackle inequality, treat all people with dignity and respect and continue to work to improve services for all service users.

## **12 The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act 2018**

12.1 As a directorate of RBKC, Housing Management shares the commitment to ensure that all data is:

- Processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner.
- Collected for a specific and legitimate purpose and not used for anything other than this stated purpose, or as provided for in our privacy and fair processing notices.
- Relevant and limited to whatever the requirements are for which the data is processed.
- Accurate, and where necessary, kept up to date. Any identified inaccuracies will be amended or removed without undue delay.
- Stored for as long as required, as specified within RBKC's Records Retention policy.
- Secured with appropriate solutions, which protect the data against unauthorised or unlawful processing and accidental loss, destruction, or damage.

12.2 For further information about the Council's commitment to GDPR, please see the Council's website at [www.rbkc.gov.uk](http://www.rbkc.gov.uk).

## **13 Compliance, Monitoring and Review**

13.1 We will measure and monitor our performance against our key performance indicators and will make changes and improvements to the service where required.

13.2 The overall responsibility for the approval of this policy sits with the Housing Management Directorate.

13.3 The Head of Neighbourhood Management, Head of Fire, Health and Safety will be responsible for reviewing this policy

13.4 This policy will be reviewed in conjunction with the procedure every five years, or when legislative or regulatory changes take place that could affect it. The next review will take place by: May 2030