



Communal Areas Policy – Housing

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Introduction

This policy sets out our approach to Fire Safety and Health and Safety in the communal areas of Wigan Council residential properties, managed within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). The HRA is the council's budget for managing and maintaining council homes, funded mainly by tenants' rent. The purpose is to find the best balance between supporting people to make their environment as attractive as possible, whilst keeping people safe and ensuring that protected evacuation routes are clear.

A communal area is any shared area used by tenants or leaseholders of the council in common. It includes shared entrance halls, stairways, landings, balconies, common rooms, yards, communal garden areas, parking areas and any fittings or fixtures supplied by the council and used in common with other tenants and leaseholders of the Council. Any communal area on our estates must be kept clean, neat and tidy in appearance.

This policy supports Wigan Council's wider ambitions under the Progress with Unity, by ensuring communal areas in council housing are safe, attractive, and inclusive spaces that promote wellbeing and community pride. The policy not only meets statutory obligations but also strengthens community resilience and supports the Council's vision of vibrant, safe, and connected neighbourhoods.

Legal and Regulatory Context

Wigan Council is committed to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of tenants and residents in all communal areas of its housing stock. This policy aligns with key legislation and regulatory standards and will take all reasonable steps to ensure the health and safety of tenants in their homes and associated communal areas.

This policy refers to the following:

- The Housing Act 1985
- Building Safety Act 2022
- Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order 2005
- NFCC- Fire Safety in Specialised Housing
- BS 9999:2017 – Fire Safety in the design, management and use of buildings Code of Practice
- Approved Document 'B'.

By adhering to these standards, Wigan Council ensures that communal areas are managed in a way that prioritises safety, legal compliance, and resident wellbeing.

Risk Assessment Framework

Wigan Council will undertake Fire Risk Assessments (FRA) for all buildings with communal areas, ensuring compliance with regulatory and housing safety standards. Interim reviews will be carried out following any significant building changes, reported hazards, or incidents that may affect fire safety. The Building Safety Team will be responsible for maintaining records of all assessments and ensuring findings are communicated to residents through letters, digital platforms, and noticeboards. Any identified risks will be addressed promptly in line with statutory obligations.

Assessment Frequency

- High- Rise and sheltered/extra care are assessed annually.
- 3 - storey general needs are every 2 years
- 2 - storey general needs are every 3 years.

Aims and Objectives

This policy aims to support Wigan Councils Fire Safety Policy which governs strategic compliance and risk management across all housing stock. The Communal Areas Policy outlines the day-to-day operational management and tenancy enforcement in shared spaces.

The policy aims to ensure resident safety in the communal areas of all Wigan Council housing stock. It is aimed at supporting customers and staff to take a sensible approach to fire safety and communal area storage. This should be in line with the tenancy agreement, leaseholder contract legal framework, regulations and guidance from the national chief fire officer.

Customers have advised that the communal space outside of their home is important to them. This policy aims to make these areas attractive and as usable as possible, but in a safe way.

Customers may report any issues of concern in relation to their building via the following methods:

- Our website – www.wigan.gov.uk
- Report It - [Report a council owned housing / tenancy issue](#)
- By email – myhome@wigan.gov.uk
- By phone – Wigan Council Contact Centre, Tel 01942 489005
- In writing – Wigan Council, Building Safety Team, Place Directorate, Wigan Town Hall, Library Street, Wigan, WN1 1YN
- In person – Wigan Life Centre, The Wiend, Wigan, WN1 1NH or Leigh Life Centre Turnpike Centre, Civic Square, Market Street, Leigh, WN7 1EB

- By submitting customer feedback or surveys

Managing Communal Areas

Wigan Council Responsibilities

Wigan Council is committed to ensuring communal areas are safe, clean, and compliant with Fire Safety Regulations. To achieve this, the Council will:

- **Provide clear information** on fire safety and communal area rules to **all residents** (tenants, leaseholders, and sheltered accommodation residents) at the start of occupancy and throughout their agreement.
- **Carry out regular inspections** of communal areas and take prompt action to remove hazards or obstructions.
- **Maintain communal areas** in good repair and decorate them in line with planned maintenance programmes.
- **Communicate updates** through multiple channels, including social media, *Borough Life* magazine, annual rent or service charge letters, and leaseholder communications.
- **Work collaboratively with residents** to find alternative storage solutions where possible and offer advice on fire safety compliance.

Safety Standards

The Council has a legal obligation to ensure communal areas remain clear and safe for emergency evacuation. Items that could obstruct escape routes or produce toxic smoke during a fire must not be stored in these areas.

What Counts as a Communal Area

Communal Areas include (but are not limited to):

- Entrance Halls
- Staircases
- Corridors
- Balconies
- Communal rooms
- Bin stores
- Laundries
- Drying areas
- Lifts
- Kitchens
- Walkways
- Communal gardens

- Parking areas
- Mobility scooter charging rooms / scooter sheds
- Service cupboards

Prohibited Items

To keep Communal Areas safe, residents must not store personal possessions or unwanted items. Examples of prohibited items include (not exhaustive):

- Pushchairs, mobility scooters, bicycles
- Furniture, decorating equipment, ladders
- Carpets, rugs, potting sheds
- White goods (e.g., fridges, freezers, washing machines, tumble dryers) – especially if connected with extension leads, as this poses a serious fire risk
- Christmas decorations, window dressings
- Doormats
- Plants, artificial plants and plastic planters
- Flammable or combustible materials

Prohibited Use of Communal Electricity Points

Residents must **not** use communal electricity points to charge personal items or operate personal electrical devices in communal areas, as this can create safety hazards and increase fire risk. The only exception is when using a designated charging point in an approved charging room or scooter shed.

Examples of prohibited use include (but are not limited to):

- Charging personal mobility scooters **outside** designated charging rooms or sheds.
- Plugging in phones, tablets, laptops, or other personal electronics.
- Using personal kettles, microwaves, or other kitchen appliances in communal areas.
- Operating heaters, fans, or similar devices for personal use.
- Charging electric bikes, scooters or hoverboards.
- Any other personal electrical equipment not provided or approved by housing services.

Enforcement

Items left in communal areas or electrical cupboards will be removed immediately if they pose a fire risk or obstruction. The cost of removal may

be recovered from the resident. Staff will communicate with residents where possible and, where feasible, offer alternatives. In some cases, this may not be possible due to the level of risk or building design.

Resident Responsibilities

All residents, including tenants, leaseholders, and those in sheltered / extra accommodation, are required to:

- Keep all Communal Areas, including gardens clean, tidy, and free from obstruction at all times. Personal possessions, rubbish, or flammable materials must not be stored in these spaces, as they can block access or pose a fire risk.
- Cooperate with Wigan Council and other residents to maintain safe and accessible shared spaces.
- Refrain from using communal electricity points to charge personal items or operate personal electrical devices in communal areas.
- Allow access for fire safety inspections and any necessary works to ensure compliance with building safety standards.
- Understand that items left in communal areas may be removed without notice if they present a hazard, and costs for removal may be recovered where applicable.

Accessibility and Support for Vulnerable Residents

The Council is committed to ensuring communal areas remain accessible for all residents, including those with mobility challenges or other vulnerabilities. Where required, individual evacuation plans will be developed in partnership with residents and relevant agencies. All policy information will be available in accessible formats, including large print, audio, and translated versions upon request.

Individual Flat Entrance Doors – Fire Safety Requirements

Flat entrance doors are a critical part of the building's fire protection strategy for both tenants and leaseholders. These doors help prevent the spread of fire and smoke between individual dwellings and communal areas.

Important rules:

- Do not alter, replace, or damage flat entrance doors without prior written consent from Wigan Council.

- Do not drill into, attach items to, or otherwise modify the door or its frame (e.g., installing hooks, doorbells, or security devices) as this can compromise fire safety integrity.
- Residents must provide annual access to Council-approved contractors for inspection and verification that fire doors meet all relevant fire safety standards.
- Council tenants are legally required to allow access for inspections or works related to fire door compliance. Failure to provide access without a valid reason may result in formal tenancy action.
- Leaseholders must also comply with fire door standards. Failure to allow access or maintain the door appropriately may result in enforcement action or recovery of costs.

Balconies

Balconies can present a high level of risk. Any items permitted on balconies must be fire-resistant and pose no fire risk. Items that should not be there include (**Please note that this is not an exhaustive list*):

- Barbeques
- Gas bottles
- Fuel containers
- Fire pits
- Chiminea
- Candles
- Drying towels

Staff Responsibility

All staff should be vigilant in their duties, and any problems relating to common parts should be referred to the relevant Neighbourhood Tenant Officer within the Tenancy Services Team or Scheme Manager (for all Sheltered Accommodation) or Building Safety Team.

Escalation Policy

For all resident types (tenants, leaseholders, and sheltered accommodation), the Council will follow a structured escalation process to resolve issues in communal areas. The core principles education, communication, and enforcement remain the same, although the approach may vary slightly depending on the resident type.

Communal Area Safety & Escalation Process

To maintain safe escape routes, Wigan Council operates a zero-tolerance approach to items left in communal areas. Advice and alternative solutions will be offered where possible and we will work with residents to resolve issues identified.

Step 1: Immediate Action

- High-risk items (e.g., flammable liquids, gas bottles, charging e-scooters) will be **removed immediately** without notice.
- Items removed will be stored for **28 days** before disposal

Step 2: Initial Notice

- For non-high-risk items, residents receive an immediate verbal or **written advisory notice** requesting removal within **48 hours**.
- We will speak to you or leave a notice explaining the issue and why it needs to be resolved. Advice and alternative solutions will be offered where possible.

Step 3: Legal Notice for the Removal of Possessions in Communal Areas

If the items remain after 48 hours, we issue a formal legal warning notice giving you a further **7 days** to remove the items.

Notice includes:

- Description of item(s)
- Deadline for removal 7 days from date of service
- Consequences of non-compliance (removal and possible charges)

Step 4: Removal and Disposal

If items remain after the **7-day legal** warning period, the Council will remove them from the communal area. Removed items will be stored securely for up to **28 days** to allow the resident an opportunity to reclaim them.

If the items are not reclaimed within this **28-day period**, they will be disposed of. The Council may recover reasonable costs associated with the removal, storage, and disposal of items from the resident responsible.

Communication

All steps will be communicated clearly to residents through:

- Written notices
- Digital platforms
- Noticeboards in communal areas

Emergency Preparedness

Residents will be provided with clear guidance on what to do in the event of a fire or other emergency. This will include evacuation routes, assembly points, and contact details for emergency services. Links to Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service safety advice will be included in welcome packs and online resources.

Support

We aim to work collaboratively with residents to resolve issues before considering enforcement. If you need support or guidance, please reach out using the details in the **“Who to Contact”** section. Together, we can keep our building safe and welcoming for everyone.

Tenant Engagement

Wigan Council is committed to working in partnership with residents to create safe, welcoming, and well-maintained communal spaces. Engagement will focus on:

Consultation and Co-Design

- Involve tenants in decisions about improvements to communal areas through surveys, resident meetings, and digital feedback tools.
- Provide clear timelines and updates on planned works or enhancements.

Community Ownership

- Encourage residents to take pride in shared spaces by promoting community-led initiatives such as gardening projects or noticeboards for local information.
- Recognise and celebrate positive contributions from residents through newsletters and social media.

Clear Guidance and Support

- Include practical guidance on communal area standards in tenancy agreements, welcome packs, and online resources.
- Offer accessible formats (large print, audio, other languages) and provide additional support for vulnerable residents to comply with communal area rules.

Ongoing Communication

- Share regular updates on inspections, maintenance schedules, and safety checks via multiple channels (letters, email, social media, and community boards).
- Provide easy reporting options for issues or suggestions, including QR codes and online forms.

Equality and Diversity

We are committed to fairness and equality for all regardless of their colour, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, age, religion or belief, family circumstances or offending history. Our aim is to ensure that our policies and procedures do not create an unfair disadvantage for anyone, either directly or indirectly.

Data protection and equality impact assessments have been undertaken in respect of this policy and which identified no negative impact on any person/group with a protected characteristic as a result of this policy.

Complaints and Feedback

Complaints

Unfortunately, we don't always get things right, if a customer is unhappy with the service, they have received from Wigan Council, we ask that they let us know. We are committed to making it easy for anyone who is unhappy with a service, or experience provided by the Council, to tell us about it. Where customers require additional support, we will endeavour to provide a service that seeks to meet the needs of a particular individual or household.

You can make a complaint to us in whichever way is easiest for you.

- Use our online form at www.wigan.gov.uk/contactus
- Email us at complaints@wigan.gov.uk
- Phone us on (01942) 827607.
- Write to us at the Complaints and Information team, PO Box 100, Wigan, WN1 3DS.
- Call into any public Council office.

In cases where we cannot resolve complaints informal, complaints are dealt with in line with Wigan Council Complaints Policy and a Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints process is followed. If a customer remains unhappy and are not satisfied with our response, they can appeal through the Housing Ombudsman service, the Local Government Ombudsman, or their local MP.

How to complain to the Housing Ombudsman

- Use the online complaint form at [Make a complaint - Housing Ombudsman \(housing-ombudsman.org.uk\)](https://www.housing-ombudsman.org.uk)
- Phone them on 0300 111 3000
- Email: info@housing-ombudsman.org.uk

How to complain to the Local Government Social Care Ombudsman

- Use the online complaint form at [Contact us - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](https://www.local-ombudsman.org.uk)
- Phone them on 0300 061 0614

Feedback

It is vital we know what our customers think and that is why your feedback and suggestions are important to us.

- Tell us about any feedback or suggestions you have that might make our services better or more efficient
- Let us know if we have given you a good service.

This helps us to understand what is important to you and to share good practice so that we can improve our services. Use this link to complete the online form [Give us feedback](#)

Who to Contact

If you have concerns, questions, or need to report an issue related to communal areas, fire safety, or tenancy matters, please use the following contact options:

General Reporting

- **Website:** www.wigan.gov.uk
- **Report a Housing/Tenancy Issue:** [Report it](#)
- **Phone:** Wigan Council Contact Centre – 01942 489005
- **In Writing:**
Building Safety Team
Place Directorate
Wigan Town Hall
Library Street
Wigan, WN1 1YN

In Person:

- Wigan Life Centre, The Wiend, Wigan, WN1 1NH
- Leigh Life Centre, Turnpike Centre, Civic Square, Market Street, Leigh, WN7 1EB

External Agencies

- **Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service (GMFRS)** – For fire safety visits [HFSA - Greater Manchester Fire Rescue Service](#)

Review and Version Control

This policy will be reviewed every two years or sooner if required by legislative changes or operational needs. The Service Manager for Tenancy Management is responsible for coordinating the review process.

A version control table will be maintained to track amendments and ensure clarity on the current policy status.

Version	Date Approved	Summary of Changes	Approved by
1.0	January 2026	New policy issued – Communal Areas – Housing Policy 2026	Full Council