

Estate Services Policy

1.	Policy objective
1.1	<p>Watford Community Housing (“WCH”) works with customers to deliver the homes, services and neighbourhoods we, and our local communities, want. Having a clean, safe and well-maintained environment in which to live is important to our customers and we recognise that the appearance of an estate or group of homes enhances well-being and a positive environment in which to live. We therefore aim to make our homes and surrounding areas as attractive and well maintained as possible.</p>
1.2	<p>This Policy outlines the services we will provide as well as the roles and responsibilities of residents in helping us to achieve these goals together. The service will be delivered in accordance with the WCH’s Service Standards (see Grapevine).</p>
2.	Legislative & Regulatory requirements
2.1	<p>Regulatory</p> <p>Social Housing (Regulation) Act: Consumer Standard (July 2023)</p> <p>The Safety and Quality Standard – requires landlords to provide safe and good quality homes and landlord services to tenants.</p> <p>The Transparency, Influence and Accountability Standard – requires landlords to be open with tenants and treat them with fairness and respect so that tenants can access services, raise complaints when necessary, influence decision-making and hold their landlord to account.</p> <p>The Neighbourhood and Community Standard – requires landlords to engage with other relevant parties so that tenants can live in safe and well-maintained neighbourhoods and feel safe in their homes.</p> <p>The Tenancy Standard – sets requirements for the fair allocation and letting of homes and for how those tenancies are managed and ended by landlords.</p>
2.2	<p>Legislative</p> <p>The Health & Safety Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO) requires landlords to carry out fire risk assessments in the common areas of HMOs, flats, maisonettes and sheltered accommodation.</p>

3.	Scope and definitions
3.1.	This Policy applies to Watford Community Housing Group, including its subsidiary and joint venture companies.
3.2	WCH as a social landlord must provide good quality housing services for residents and prospective residents.
3.3	Under their Tenancy Agreement tenants are required to maintain their gardens and ensure there are no obstructions in communal areas, as governed by the Agreement. Communal gardens are maintained by WCH, however gardens (including pre-existing trees, shrubs, hedges or furniture) are required to be maintained by tenants. Additional help is available to vulnerable customers who are unable to do this under the Vulnerable Customers Policy.
3.4	We define Estates as localities where we own and manage a significant number of properties.
3.5	We define Communal Areas as areas of land adjacent to our blocks as walkways, parking bays, amenity grounds, external storage. also internal hallways, landings and stairwells, bin and bike stores, internal storages. in blocks of flats, owned or managed by WCH and which are for the shared use of our customers.
3.6	Neighbourhoods are the immediate surroundings and environment of the area where our customers live.
4.	Objectives and Service Standards
4.1	<p>The key objectives of this Policy are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • play a key role in keeping our Estates and Communal Areas clean, safe and well maintained and attractive places to live; • work in partnership with our customers and other providers and public bodies, where it is effective to do so; • Set out clear Service Standards for the maintenance of Estates Communal Areas; • acknowledge that our customers have a right to their chosen lifestyle providing this doesn't breach their Tenancy Agreement or negatively impact the quality of life of other residents or the local environment; • enforce our Tenancy Agreement rights in order to manage the land we own. • respond promptly to all reports of problems on our Estates and Communal Areas (see paras 4.2 - 4.11 for details of Service Standards). • work in partnership with other agencies such as Highways, Environmental Health and the Police to help maintain our Communal Areas; • involve our residents in the management of our Estates and Communal Areas where appropriate and effective to do so and treat all residents in a fair and non-discriminatory way, in accordance with our Equality and Diversity Policy; • fully comply with all relevant health & safety legislation.
4.2	Service Standards
4.2.1	We will publicise on the block notice boards the relevant Service Standard covering estates services
4.2.2	<p>We will publicise the Service Standards covering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • grounds maintenance • cleaning

5.	Response Times
5.1	We will aim to respond to any emergency in our Communal Areas (for example if a substance is spilt on an internal hallway making it slippery) within two working hours of receiving a report.
5.2	We will respond to all other non-urgent enquiries and reports of problems on our Estates and Communal Areas within 5 working days of receiving them.
6.	Estate Inspections
6.1	We will publicise on our website the quarterly estate inspection programme each year and encourage residents to be involved. We will provide feedback to our residents following each inspection with updates placed on our website.
6.2	<p>Housing Officers and mobile estate officers will visit and formally inspect all estates and external communal areas at least every 3 months to review the quality and standard of the estate. We will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor our estate service contracts (grounds maintenance). • Report repairs to the Gateway repairs team, or other external agencies • Be proactive with enforcement of the terms of our tenancy agreements • Improve residents' access to our staff and visibly be present on estates • Identify projects for our estate improvement/better communities schemes • Invite residents to Estate Inspections and encourage attendees to become resident inspectors through additional training. • Encourage partnership working • Check for any health & safety issues that we need to address <p>(Note – our staff will also use their regular visits to our residents and estates to identify issues and problems).</p>
6.3	An annual Fire Risk Assessment will be carried out by a specialist contractor. See also the Fire Safety Policy and Procedure.
6.4	<p>We will carry out block inspections checks of communal areas as part of our formal quarterly inspections;</p> <p>Where household items are being stored in internal communal areas during Fire Risk Assessments, we will serve notices on residents giving them 5 working days to remove the risks.</p>
6.5	If these items are high-risk health and safety concerns, we aim to remove these items from the block within 24 hours.
7.	Communal Areas
7.1	Communal Cleaning and Mobile estate officers
7.1.1	We will provide an efficient and cost effective cleaning service to all our designated internal Communal Areas.
7.1.2	<p>We will provide an efficient and cost-effective service through our Mobile Estates Officers to all our designated internal and external Communal Areas on larger estates. This service includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Litter picking • Reporting fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles and repairs to Communal Areas & arranging their removal • Health and Safety checks • Bin area maintenance

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring of estate service contracts
7.1.3	We will regularly clean our communal hallways, entrance areas to flats, stairs and landings to make sure that all surfaces are clean and free from dirt, dust and grime. The Service Standards for this are part of the relevant service contract and are published in the block notice boards.
7.2	Communal Grounds Maintenance
7.2.1	We will provide an efficient and cost effective Grounds Maintenance service to all of our communal grounds areas.
7.2.2	Contractors will maintain our communal areas of grass and shrubbery throughout the year. It is anticipated each year during the growing season and seasonal changes a minimum of 10 grass cuts will be achieved. They will maintain our flower beds and other shrub areas, weed our communal areas and collect litter accordingly before scheduled work is under taken . Our contractors will maintain all shrub beds and hedges on communal land 3 times a year in a growing season and 1 in the winter months. The Service Standards for this are part of the relevant service contract and are published on our website.
7.3	Trees
7.3.1	Trees on our communal land will be surveyed at least every Three years (and more frequently as part of routine inspections of our estates). We will arrange for remedial works to any trees that are identified as dangerous, dead or diseased. We will aim to ensure that any works needed to those trees identified as a danger, is completed within the arboriculture surveyors recommendations . Non-urgent works will be prioritised from estate inspections and programmed surveys.
7.3.2	Trees growing within customers individual gardens are their responsibility to maintain. If a customer informs WCH that a tree in their garden is dead, dying or dangerous, We will initiate an inspection to decipher if works need to be carried out. If works are required, WCH will discuss options with the customer and if necessary contractors will be instructed to carry out the works which will then be recharged to the customer.
7.4	Playgrounds
7.4.1	We will carry out ROSPA (Royal Society of the Prevention of Accidents) checks and inspections of equipment in our playgrounds on a weekly basis . We will address any maintenance and safety issue identified during the inspection. If during the inspection failings are identified i.e. removing a faulty swing in an open play area, the playground would be locked and taken out of service. As part of this service the area is litter picked, swept where necessary and bins emptied on a weekly basis.
7.5	Roads and Paths
7.5.1	We will keep any roads or paths which are our responsibility (i.e. not adopted) clean and tidy, free from weeds and well maintained. Our estates have a large number of trees which produce a lot of leaf-fall; this is regarded as a natural occurrence and not something we can control or seek to keep pathways free from at all times.
7.5.2	Trip hazards will be identified and reported as part of the regular Estate Inspections and site visits.

7.5.3	We will report any problems on roads or paths owned and maintained by the Local Authority (Adopted) to the relevant Highways Section.
7.5.4	We will work in partnership with Local Authorities to address issues with recycling areas located on our land.
7.6	Abandoned Vehicles
7.6.1	We will respond to a report of an abandoned vehicle on WCH owned land within 5 working days . Watford Community Housing will notice the car giving the owner 10 working days to make contact. If no contact is made a removal and disposable request will be passed onto contractors.
7.6.2	We will check out estates and communal areas for abandoned vehicles at least every three months during estate inspections
7.6.3	We are unable to control the time taken to remove vehicles, but we will work with local car removal contractors to check ownership and arrange for the removal of abandoned vehicles as quickly as possible.
7.7	Illegal Dumping of Rubbish
7.7.1	We will work with Local Authorities to investigate all incidents of illegal dumping of bulky items and remove them within 7 working days . If there is a significant risk to health and safety of residents, we will remove the rubbish within 1 working day of it being reported.
7.7.2	We will publish a list of Local Authority and other useful phone numbers for residents to use in dealing with rubbish collection and other matters on their estate
7.7.3	If we are able to identify the perpetrator of any fly tipping we will work with the Local Authority to fine or prosecute the perpetrator. In cases where we are unable to identify the perpetrator of any fly tipping, the cost of removing illegally dumped items will be included in the service charge of every resident entitled to use the area.
7.7.4	We will work in partnership with Local Authorities to address issues of misuse of recycling areas on our land.
7.8	Vandalism
7.8.1	We will investigate all reports of vandalism to our Communal Areas.
7.8.2	We will take a positive approach to working with other agencies and groups to discourage acts of vandalism.
7.8.3	We will aim to remove graffiti within 7 working days following it being reported / identified. If any such graffiti is of a sexual, racial or offensive nature we will remove it within 1 working day.
7.8.4	We will take a positive approach to working with other agencies and groups to try to identify perpetrators who vandalise our Communal Areas or other WCH property; we will take appropriate action against all identified perpetrators. Where possible we will

	also recharge perpetrators for the full cost of any works we have to carry out to make good any damage caused.
7.9	Estate Improvements
7.9.1	<p>We will have schemes that can provide funding for improvements to our estates that benefit as many of our residents as possible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects can be identified by anyone living in the Community. Ideas can be developed through working with staff of the Community Team, raised with local residents groups.
7.9.2	We will publicise these schemes and encourage our residents to make requests for improvements by using local residents groups or contacting us directly.
7.10	Resident Involvement
7.10.1	<p>We will consult with and involve our residents about the services we provide to our Estates and Communal Areas so that we meet the needs of our residents. We will encourage our residents to have a key role by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reporting any problems, complaints or service failures • Being involved in estate inspections to include grounds maintenance monitoring • Becoming a resident inspector • Having their say about their estate through residents' groups, surveys and any other means available to them. • Providing feedback when consulted about specific issues. • Suggesting estate improvements. • Developing service standards • Capturing customer satisfaction
7.10.2	We will keep residents informed locally by regularly updating notice-boards.
7.10.3	We will measure resident satisfaction with our cleaning and grounds maintenance service, by carrying out monthly surveys. We will also measure tenant satisfaction of our communal areas every three months through tenant satisfaction measures (TSM)
7.11	Residents' Responsibilities
7.11.1	We will encourage our residents to help keep our Estates and Communal Areas clean and well maintained by reminding them of their responsibilities, and where necessary taking action to enforce the terms of tenancy agreements.
7.11.2	<p><u>Communal Areas</u> – we will remind residents to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep all internal communal areas clean and tidy. • In accordance with Fire Safety Regulations not to store items such as bicycles or prams etc. in communal areas, including stair wells and communal entrance ways • Not cause any other obstruction or nuisance in a shared area. • Not dump, or allow to be dumped, items of rubbish, which could include general household rubbish, furniture, white goods or any other such items on estates and any communal areas, both internally and externally.
7.11.3	<u>Parking</u> – we will remind our residents to:

7.11.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park considerately in parking and garage areas on our estates. • Not run any car repair or sales business from our parking areas, garage areas or green areas on our estates <p><u>Pets</u> – we will remind our residents to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep their pets under control and dogs kept on leads at all times in communal areas. • Not allow their pets to foul in or damage any communal areas.
8.	Equality and Diversity Considerations
8.1	The contract for estate cleaning and grounds maintenance was tendered in 2023/24 and residents influenced the specification of works covered by the contract.
8.2	We will act fairly and consistently in the application of this Policy and will not discriminate against any person on the grounds of their age, race, ethnicity/nationality, gender, religion, sexual orientation or disability.
9.	Monitoring & Adoption Criteria
9.1	Residents express satisfaction with cleaning and grounds maintenance by completing satisfaction surveys sent by the Customer Relations Team.
9.2	The Estates Team will complete monthly monitoring of the cleaning and grounds maintenance.
9.3	Monitoring of the contracts is detailed under the terms of the contract at monthly contract monitoring meetings.
9.4	Performance Indicators are reported to EMT, GMT, CEC and to the Group Board as requested.
9.5	The successful application and adoption of this Policy shall be assessed using the Adoption Criteria at Appendix B. The aim is to ensure that we uphold this Policy and our related Estates Service Standards and meet the aims of this Policy.
10.	Persons responsible
10.1	Estates Contract Manager Cleaning and Grounds Maintenance Contract Management. Overall responsibility for staff and KPI's.
10.2	Senior Estate and Contracts Officer – Cleaning & grounds maintenance contract management. Collecting and recording the estate inspections, and block inspections.
10.3	Customer Relations Team – Responsible for collecting customer satisfaction data and providing feedback to residents on behalf of the organisation.
10.4	Senior Estate and Contracts Officer and Senior Mobile Estate officer– Performance and quality monitoring of the services delivered.
11.	Related documents
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounds Maintenance Contract • Cleaning Contract • Planned Works Policy & Procedure • Responsive Repairs • Property Standards Policy

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Standards • Fire Safety Policy and Procedure • Community Development Strategy • Vulnerable Customers Policy & Procedure • ASB Policy & Procedure • Equality & Diversity Policy • Abandoned Vehicles Procedure • Communal Areas Procedure
13.	Approval
Approved by:	EMT: March 2024
Review date:	March 2024
Next review date:	June 2029
Policy 'owner':	Estates Contract Manager