

Fire Safety Policy

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1. Policy Objective

The aim of this Policy is providing an organisational commitment to meet legislation keeping residents safe ensuring fire safety standards in properties owned or managed by Watford Community Housing (WCH) and WCH's joint ventures and subsidiaries.

The Policy objectives are to:

- Meet WCH's legal obligations as a landlord.
- To provide a framework within which fire safety is managed.
- Set out key roles and responsibilities for delivery.
- Reduce the risk of fire occurring in WCH's properties.
- Provide suitable and sufficient fire risk assessments and general fire precautions within our properties.

The operational approach for fire safety delivery will be set out within The Fire Safety Management Plan (FSMP) which will detail the operational approach to managing fire safety, including monitoring and accountability, the assessment of fire risk, remedial action to reduce fire risk, and the maintenance of electrical and mechanical fire safety systems within WCH's stock. The FSMP will set out 'the how' WCH meet its statutory obligations which are outlined in this Policy, therefore the FSMP will become enforceable through this Policy.

2. Legislative & Regulatory Requirements

Legislation

- The Housing Act 2004
- Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
- Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- The Building Safety Act 2022
- The Fire Safety Act 2021
- The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO)
- The Building Safety Regulations
- Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (Amendment) Regulations 2022
- The Fire Safety (England) Regulations 2022
- Safety & Quality Standards – Consumer Safety

Regulatory

The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) requires registered providers to comply with its Regulatory Standards. Fire safety is covered by the Home Standard which requires meeting all statutory requirements for the health and safety of occupants.

The enforcing authority for the Housing Act is the local housing authority (the local council).

The enforcing authority for the FSO is the local fire and rescue authority.

3. Scope & Definitions

Scope

This policy applies to all WCH staff, contractors, and others carrying out works in WCH premises.

This policy applies to all buildings owned or occupied by WCH or its subsidiary companies. This includes the following locations:

- Rented properties including garages.
- Communal areas.
- Offices, community hubs, and any storage facilities.
- Commercial leaseholders / management arrangements where WCH retains the responsibility to maintain all or part of the building.
- Leaseholders and shared owners, living in self-contained accommodation, where WCH retains the responsibility to maintain all or part of the building.

This Policy applies to all WCH properties, regardless of tenure or type.

Definitions

‘Responsible Person’ refers to “the person who has control of the premises in connection with the carrying on of a trade, business or other undertaking”. In workplaces this is always the employer and in communal or shared areas of residential premises this will usually be the landlord.

‘Accountable Person’ refers to “the person responsible for assessing and managing the risks posed to people in and about the building from structural failure or the spread of fire in the parts of the building they are responsible for”.

‘Fire risk assessment’ refers to is a systematic and structured examination of the likelihood of a fire occurring and the likely impact it will have on customers and others who may be affected by the fire. The purpose is to evaluate the risks resulting from a fire, considering existing fire safety measures and determining where additional measures are necessary.

General fire precautions are measures which aim to:

- Reduce the risk of fire on the premises and the risk of the spread of fire.
- Support the means of escape from the premises affected by a fire.
- Ensure the means of escape can be safely and effectively used.
- Fight fires.
- Detect a fire at a given premise and alert those likely to be affected; and
- Provide instruction and training on the measures used to mitigate the effects of a fire.

'Competence' means possessing the relevant skills, knowledge, experience and behaviour to efficiently and effectively carry out a task. The level of competence required will vary according to the complexity of the task so, for example, a person carrying out a fire risk assessment of a tall complex building will require more specialist knowledge than one in a small modern block. Likewise, it may be relatively straightforward to train a person to be competent to carry out a weekly test on a fire alarm system, whilst repair or maintenance of the system would always be carried out by a qualified engineer.

Third party certification refers to assurance schemes that list companies that have been independently and externally assessed against a recognised standard and then continually monitored through ongoing surveillance inspections. Such schemes can demonstrate that WCH has exercised due diligence and provide confidence as to the competence of contractors.

'Passive fire protection' is the structural fire protection, built as a fundamental, integral part of most buildings. It will include elements such as fire compartmentation, fire stopping and fire doors etc.

'Active fire protection' is a system or facility in the building that requires triggering or switching on (either automatically or manually) before becoming operational. It will include fire alarms, sprinkler systems, smoke vents etc.

4. Roles & Responsibilities

The Chief Executive is the 'Responsible Person' as defined by the legislation and above at 3.2.1. They have overall responsibility for fire safety and for providing the resources necessary for implementation of the arrangements. This includes ensuring adequate resources are made available to enable the Policy objectives to be met.

The Executive Management Team (EMT) is responsible for:

- Monitoring organisational fire safety performance to identify current performance and promote continuous improvement.
- Consulting with staff on fire safety issues as appropriate, such as amendments to fire safety management procedures.
- Ensuring an audit programme is in place to provide assurance that fire safety operational procedures and processes are maintained; and
- Reviewing fire incident investigations and ensuring follow up actions are completed.
- The Group Director of Partnerships is the strategic lead for fire safety for WCH and is responsible for ensuring that:
- Systems, procedures and standards are in place for planning and coordinating the implementation of the Fire Safety Policy.
- Adequate resources are allocated to managing fire risks.
- Ensuring that appropriately qualified and suitably experienced people are employed to implement this policy to ensure that appropriate programmes of work are in place to discharge relevant duties.

- Staff have access to the training, information and instruction appropriate to their role; and
- There is access to competent fire safety advice.

The Asset Management and Compliance Manager reports directly to the Head of Resident and Building Safety and is responsible for:

- Maintaining an up-to-date property register.
- Conducting audits to ensure that provisions meet WCH fire safety standards.
- Ensuring that fire precautions measures are properly maintained.
- Ensure the investigations regarding fires and fire near miss incidents are carried out and controls are introduced to reduce the risk of such incidents recurring, reduce financial loss and improve fire risk precautions; and
- Liaising with enforcing authorities on a regular basis

The Leadership Team is responsible for the overall effectiveness of this Policy & Procedure in their areas of responsibility. They will:

- Ensure adequate resources are allocated.
- Monitor performance against this Policy; and
- Advise the Group Director of Partnerships of any problems arising in connection with the management of fire risk.

The Partnerships Team is responsible for ensuring that any new developments and acquisitions are designed and constructed to achieve compliance with the fire safety requirements of the Building Regulations and meet WCH end-user needs and specifications. They will ensure that new build schemes are:

- Monitored throughout construction.
- Assessed for compliance with WCH fire safety standards.
- Provided with a fire design strategy to ensure the necessary fire safety information is available, as required by the building regulations, to enable WCH to manage properties effectively; and
- A formal fire risk assessment completed prior to the occupation of first residents.

Managers and Team Leaders are responsible for the day-to-day arrangements necessary to manage fire risk within their areas of control. They will:

- Identify staff training needs including the provision of regular refresher training to maintain knowledge and skills.
- Provide staff with appropriate fire safety information, instruction and supervision; and
- Ensure contractors are being managed and regularly monitored, particularly if there is hot working or a likelihood that fire precautions may be affected.

The Fire Safety Officer is responsible for providing fire safety guidance and reporting across the organisation including:

- Undertaking Fire Risk Assessments
- Undertaking, recording, and reporting on fire door inspection performance of all communal doors and yearly inspections of all flat entrance fire doors in buildings over 11 meters and/or 5 or more storeys reaching 'best endeavours' for flat entrance doors. Defects to be reported to the supporting fire contractor.
- Monitor changes in legislation, ensuring that WCH are compliant regarding fire safety requirements.
- Investigate and provide detailed reports on fires within WCH stock.

Support Staff (i.e. Estates, Housing Operations, Supported Housing) will:

- Monitor communal areas for fire safety issues and take any remedial action required.
- Where action cannot be taken then promptly report to the Surveying Manager.
- In cooperation with cleaning staff, keep communal areas clear of obstacles that could prevent safe escape; and
- Monitor residents' areas and raise any concerns with regards to fire safety to the Assets and Compliance Manager

Employees are responsible for:

- Working in accordance with the defined fire safety arrangements.
- Assisting in risk assessments and audits as required.
- Carrying out specific fire safety tasks that are required to fulfil their role.
- Reporting fire safety hazards or concerns as they are identified paying attention to areas where existing fire safety arrangements are suspected to have failed to adequately reduce risks to an acceptable level; and
- Not interfering with anything provided to safeguard their health and safety and reporting any incidents and near misses.

Contractors are responsible for promptly reporting any fire risk concerns they become aware of.

5. Policy Statement

Standards: Where reasonably practicable, WCH will adopt and apply current housing industry fire safety best practice, and the benchmark standards contained in the relevant British Standards, Approved Codes of Practice and nationally recognised guidelines.

Procedures: Documented FSMP and procedures will be developed to ensure a consistent application of fire safety standards across WCH and to support staff in carrying out their duties. These will include areas such as fire risk assessment, fire inspection, management of communal areas, resident engagement, fire alarm testing and any other areas concerning fire safety.

Fire Risk Assessments: A fire risk assessment will be used as the basis for monitoring fire safety compliance. The significant findings will be recorded, and any deficiencies identified will be prioritised and rectified accordingly.

Where external assessors are used, they will be professionally registered, and third party certificated.

Fire Door Inspections: WCH will ensure that on buildings over 11 meters and/or 5 or more storeys, communal fire door inspections will be completed on a quarterly basis, with flat entrance doors checked yearly. These inspections will be recorded onto the organisation's compliance management software, with any deficiencies identified will be prioritised and rectified accordingly.

Maintenance, repair, inspection and testing: WCH will ensure that all active and passive fire safety measures are maintained and repaired only by approved third party certificated contractors. Maintenance procedures will be in line with the recommendations contained in the relevant British Standards, Approved Codes of Practice and nationally recognised guidelines.

WCH will ensure that regular inspections, checks and routine testing of fire precautions and equipment are carried out by competent people. Where WCH staff are used, suitable training will be provided.

The results of all maintenance, inspections and routine tests will be recorded onto the asset management software.

Training: WCH will provide basic fire safety information (e.g. evacuation procedures and what to do if a fire alarm sounds) to all new staff on induction with refresher training being rolled out biannually.

Staff with a fire safety element to their job (such as Managers, Scheme Officers, Housing Officers, Estate Officers and Fire Marshals) will be identified to receive additional training on the requirements of their role as soon as possible after taking up the job, with refresher training being completed every 3 years. This training would normally cover areas such as hazard identification, reporting procedures, operation/testing procedures of fire alarms, emergency lights and other fire equipment as appropriate to the individual staff members role.

Resident Engagement: WCH will adopt a proactive approach to resident engagement to ensure that all WCH customers' voices are heard and there are clear processes implemented for them to raise concerns. This will include details on how to:

- Support residents to understand building safety.
- Carry out resident engagement on building safety matters for 11m+ buildings and ensure the ongoing updating of building specific engagement strategies.
- Involve residents in decision making.
- Share key information clearly and transparently; and
- Engage with vulnerable residents to carry out Person Centered Fire Risk Assessments, and where identified, a Personal Evacuation Emergency Plan.
- Adopt these principles for all buildings owned and occupied by WCH.

Communication: WCH will:

- Ensure that appropriate Fire Safety information is provided to relevant persons on our website and upon request.
- Ensure effective emergency procedures are in place and that staff and contractors are clear on their responsibilities.
- Promote awareness of fire related risks through training and induction of relevant staff. The training will be designed to fit the needs and roles of the employees being trained.
- Ensure that appropriate and suitable training is provided to staff, WCH will carry out training needs where appropriate.

6. Monitoring & Reporting

Monitoring of performance will be through the Property Services' Key Performance Indicators and reported to the Executive Management Team (EMT) and Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) on a quarterly basis. Auditing will be tracked to ensure that WCH is meeting audit requirements and quota. Compliance will be monitored by the Asset and Compliance Manager via the organisation's compliance management software.

7. Related Documents

- Occupational Health and Safety Management System
- Contract Management Policy & Procedure Gateway House Emergency Evacuation Procedure
- Building a Safer Future (Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety: Final Report)
- Fire Safety Management Plan (WIP)
- Building Safety Management System (WIP)
- Resident Engagement Strategies (WIP)
- Mandatory Occurrence Reporting System Procedure (WIP)