

# Estate Services Policy

*'A Decent Home on a Decent Estate'*

June 2024



**HILLINGDON**  
LONDON

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# 1. Introduction

The Council recognises that the effective management and maintenance of the shared areas of its housing estates is both an essential and integral part of the overall housing management function. The Council has responsibilities linked to the land it owns and manages which are set out in contract, statute and Regulatory Standards. Tenants and leaseholders rightly see the shared areas of their estates as an extension of their homes and in this context expect to see standards delivered which benefit all residents and ensure our estates are attractive, well-maintained, safe and secure places to live. We know there is a clear relationship between the quality of our homes and estate environments and overall quality of life.

The Council aims to provide a range of proactive and reactive services linked to the internal and external shared areas of estates as part of its management and maintenance offer. Tenants and leaseholders are key partners in this offer. They have contractual rights over the shared areas of the estates on which they live, they value the importance of well-managed shared areas and the contribution to a sense of well-being and community and they make a financial contribution to shared area service delivery via the service charges they pay. As key partners in this Estate Services Policy, the Council is committed to developing an approach where standards are jointly agreed with and monitored by residents. This partnership approach also recognises that tenants and leaseholders have responsibilities and obligations in respect of their use of shared areas as set out in tenancy and lease agreements.

The shared areas of estates are referenced in the Social Housing Regulator's 'Neighbourhood & Community Standard' and the 'Safety and Quality Standard'. [www.gov.uk/government/collections/regulatory-standards-for-landlords](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/regulatory-standards-for-landlords) These standards came into force from April 2024 and set down required outcomes which the Council must meet in its capacity as landlord and manager of the shared areas of estates. These outcomes are embedded within the aims and objectives of this Policy and provide the framework for its overall approach to neighbourhood management. By working towards the outcomes expected by the Regulator and engaging with tenants and leaseholders about what matters to them, the Council aims to provide a '*Decent Home on a Decent Estate*'.

## 2. Aims and Scope

Traditionally the Council's housing estates were occupied by tenants who all had the same landlord. Over time a range of tenures and occupation arrangements have come into being which makes the Council's estates more diverse and complex. Despite these developments, this Policy is applicable to all residents who live on the Council's housing estates, make use of and enjoy the shared areas and identify with the estate upon which they live.

An estate can be identified as a single block of flats, a group of blocks or a larger geographical area containing blocks and houses which are identified locally as a distinct estate or locality. The common theme across all estates is that the Council is the freeholder of all blocks and is the owner and manager of the shared areas within them and the areas of land around them. Housing estates in this context are

associated with the land and assets which are maintained at a cost to the Housing Revenue Account. This is the statutory account which receives income from rents and service charges and uses it to provide services only for Council tenants and leaseholders. As the dominant landlord and landowner on our estates, the Council is best placed to work with all residents and take a lead in coordinating and delivering positive outcomes.

The Council's Estate Services Policy brings together a number of Services which together seek to achieve the overarching Policy aim of a '*Decent Home on a Decent Estate*'. The extent of Council Services being delivered on our estates is extensive and in this context it is important for the Council in its capacity as landlord to exercise a coordinating role where management oversight ensures services are effective, efficient and meet agreed standards. These service areas include but are not limited to:

- Green Spaces
- Caretaking and Waste Services
- Responsive Repairs
- Planned Works
- Community Safety & Anti-Social Behaviour Enforcement
- Electrical & Mechanical compliance
- Building Safety
- Tenancy Management

The Council has adopted a set of output-based specifications which are collectively known as the Estate Services Standard. This standard uses pictorial representations of cleaning, caretaking and grounds maintenance to assess standards objectively and consistently. Across the Standard are a number of elements which are commonly found across housing estates such as; footpaths, stairways, landings and entrance halls, lifts, communal bin areas, grassed areas, shrub beds and tree management. Each element has four pictures which indicate a condition level or standard for that task or area. These standards are graded A (excellent), B (good), C (poor) and D (totally unacceptable). It is widely understood that standards will fall over time following delivery of an estate service. The role of the Estate Services Standard is to ensure that Services are consistently delivered to a good standard and do not fall below an acceptable standard before further scheduled services are again delivered.

The Council is committed to developing a co-inspection approach with residents as part of monitoring against the Estate Services Standard.

The safety of our residents is an overriding priority and our operational practices will, as a minimum, consistently seek to achieve our statutory obligations as a landowner and landlord. Performance and areas of statutory compliance include:

- Domestic Gas Servicing of District Heating Systems
- Legionella Risk Assessment & Water Quality Control
- Fire risk assessment work
- Dry risers
- Booster & Sewage pumps
- Fire alarms

- Lightning protection systems
- Passenger Lifts
- Automated barriers, shutters and gates
- Asbestos
- Electrical Compliance
- CCTV
- Automatic Opening Vents
- Emergency lighting
- Communal laundries / washing machines and Tumble Driers

All electrical and mechanical assets and associated statutory compliance obligations are maintained by way of service contracts.

The clear purpose of this Policy is to:

- Keep our shared areas safe, clean and well maintained and deliver estate services to a good standard.
- Ensure tenants and leaseholders are meeting their contractual tenancy and lease obligations and enforce them when they are not.
- Ensure clear standards of service are in place and are communicated to residents
- Support partnership working with key service delivery stakeholders as ‘one organisation’ to create estates and neighbourhoods that residents are proud of.
- Support the Council’s Strategy 2022-2026 including ‘Safe & Strong Communities’ and ‘A Green & Sustainable Borough.’
- Support active tenant and leaseholder participation through involvement and consultation on the provision, delivery and monitoring of estate services, ensuring that residents are treated fairly and with respect.
- Deliver well-managed, quality estate environments for all our residents that help to deter anti-social behaviour and crime.

### **3. Areas of Responsibility and key Processes**

#### **3.1 Estate Inspections**

3.1.1 In addition to routine visits our Neighbourhood Management Team will deliver a programme of estate inspections. Routine and programmed estate inspections are a key part of our proactive work aimed at managing and monitoring the condition of our estates and to ensure that shared areas meet agreed standards. Inspections also facilitate early intervention in the context of identifying indicators of emerging problems and triggering work with partners and residents to identify and implement solutions via an ‘Estate Action Plan’ approach.

3.1.2 The Council also recognises that Estate Inspections are a valuable tool in both engaging with and involving residents in the monitoring of service delivery. They also complement the existing regular ‘estate checks’ and inspections of equipment, electrical and mechanical plant, safety systems, communal fire doors and other active fire safety measures across circa 500 blocks each year.

- 3.1.3 Fire Risk Assessments are another form of planned inspection which includes the shared areas of blocks. The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 places a legal duty on the 'responsible person' [the Council] in its capacity as landlord and manager of residential blocks to undertake Fire Risk Assessments. These assessments are the foundation for the fire safety measures required in a block of flats and will help to ensure that the chance of a fire occurring in the areas under the control of the responsible person is minimised. It also helps to ensure that in the event of a fire in a block, residents can, if necessary, use the common parts safety to evacuate. The Fire Risk Assessment will also ensure that appropriate managerial arrangements, such as maintenance of the fire safety measures, are in place.
- 3.1.4 The frequency of Fire Risk Assessments is determined by the building category. The normal assessment frequency, subject to any material changes, is set out below:
- Tower blocks / high rise over 6 storeys – Annually
  - Sheltered Housing Schemes – Annually
  - Buildings used solely for temporary accommodation – Annually
  - Large street properties converted into self-contained flats – Annually
  - Medium and low rise blocks with enclosed balconies – Every 2 years
  - Medium and low rise blocks with open balconies – Every 3 years
  - Medium and low rise maisonettes with communal areas – Every 4 years
- 3.1.5 We will publish our core programme of inspections on our website and encourage tenants and leaseholders and other stakeholders to attend.
- 3.1.6 Programmed inspections are undertaken regularly on a risk based approach. They include:
- Blocks which are taller than 18 metres or are at least 7 storeys high
  - Sheltered Housing Schemes
  - Blocks designated solely for use as temporary accommodation
  - Estates containing 4 to 6 storey blocks [circa 12 estates]
  - Estates containing 2 to 3 storey blocks [circa 40 estates]
- 3.1.7 Programmed inspections will normally be undertaken quarterly unless otherwise stated. Inspections will also be undertaken and prioritised using an intelligence led approach, where information from service providers, residents and other stakeholders identifies estate based issues or 'hot spots' which can best be addressed via one or more inspections to better understand issues and a collaborative approach to problem solving.
- 3.1.8 The Council will adopt an intelligence and resident led approach to triggering and developing time limited 'Action Plans' where coordinated responses are necessary to deliver improvements and approaches to addressing presenting or emerging issues on estates. Estate Inspections will be deployed as a key tool as part of the Action Plan process.

### **3.2 Caretaking and Waste Services**

The Caretaking Service is an integral part of the Council's Waste Service. It provides mobile and static Caretakers to undertake a range of caretaking and cleaning functions across the shared areas of estates. Waste Services are also responsible for domestic refuse collection on estates [including bi-weekly collections where necessary], removal of fly-tipped waste and the provision and collection of on-site recycling.

The in-house service of 42 Caretakers and 2 Supervisors are responsible for delivering service across a total of 229 sites and 22 sheltered housing schemes. There are 8 'static' sites [larger / higher density estates] served by 13 Caretakers and a total of 15 mobile teams which service the remaining sites. In addition to scheduled works tailored to the nature and extent of the block / estate, the Caretakers also undertake seasonal work such as leaf clearance, gritting and snow clearance. Approximately 29,000 hours of scheduled caretaking work is undertaken across estates each year. Additional work includes tasks such as weekend bin rotations across the larger blocks, unblocking bin chutes, responding to spillages, bulk lumber clearance and litter removal from hard surfaces such as footpaths, parking and drying areas.

Combined, these services seek to achieve the Estate Services Standard.

Our Caretakers also act as the 'eyes and ears' on our estates and are frequently the 'first point of contact' for residents or are the first to identify a repair issue, an act of vandalism or fly-tipping.

### **3.3 Grounds Maintenance**

The Council's Green Spaces Service have a dedicated Team who maintain the soft landscaped areas to Council housing estates. This includes the delivery of scheduled works programmes which cover; grass cutting, shrub bed maintenance and hedges. The frequency and nature of tasks undertaken varies during the course of the year and the landscape features present on individual estates. Contractors are also engaged to undertake hard surface weed control across areas including estate footpaths, play areas, car parks and drying areas.

Combined, these services seek to achieve the Estate Services Standard.

### **3.4 Trees**

Council housing estates contain a tree stock of circa 5,500 trees. These trees provide a valuable contribution to estate environments. Evidence shows the positive contribution from trees in relation to; health & well-being, better micro-climates and reduced heat traps, improved absorption of excessive surface water and reduction of noise. It is essential that trees on the shared areas of estates are effectively and sensitively managed to ensure they are safe and can continue to be enjoyed by residents now and in the future.

All decisions and actions relating to the management of the Council's tree stock are underpinned by the Tree Strategy 2023. Trees on estates are inspected on a three year inspection cycle and work is then raised with our contractors

where required. The overriding priority is to ensure the tree stock remains safe. We aim to replace the number of trees we remove with planting as close to the original location as possible and to gradually increase our canopy cover

Programmed and reactive tree works seek to achieve the Estate Services Standard.

### **3.5 Reactive Repairs**

The Council's Reactive Repairs Service plays a key role in ensuring that our estates remain safe by responding to all reports of repair issues on the shared areas of estates.

The Housing Reactive Repairs Service operates through a combined approach with 80% of repairs completed by a dedicated team of 35 in-house operatives. The remaining 20% are handled by specialist contractors for specific repair needs. This service tackles over 40,500 reactive repair jobs annually, including 5,300 jobs across the shared areas of estates.

Where elements are found to have deteriorated to a point where multiple attendances have occurred and or they have reached the end of their useful life, referrals are made to the Planned works Team to schedule the presenting issue into a future programme of planned work. Where necessary and appropriate, the Reactive Repairs Service may be deployed to undertake element renewal on a reactive basis. This could be reasons related to presenting health and safety risks.

The maintenance of shared areas relies heavily on resident-led reporting, outcomes from estate checks and repair reporting by visiting and on-site staff such as caretakers. The Council's approach to and development of programmed estate inspections will readdress this balance and move to a more proactive footing with potential to better informed planned works programmes associated with shared areas of estates.

The Reactive Repairs Service plays a key role in supporting achievement of the Estate Services Standard.

### **3.6 CCTV**

3.6.1 CCTV installations on Council Housing estates facilitate remote monitoring or access to recorded footage as necessary. We use CCTV to:

- Prevent and detect criminal acts and anti-social behaviour in and arounds our homes and estates
- Ensure safe places and estates for residents and their visitors
- Protect our property and other assets
- Investigate alleged breaches of tenancy conditions and acts of enviro-crime such as fly-tipping

3.6.2 Individuals found to be responsible for criminal acts may then be the subject of enforcement action or prosecution by either the Police or the council.

- 3.6.3 Our CCTV systems are reviewed periodically to ensure they are fully compliant with all legal requirements and codes of practice, to ensure they remain fit for purpose and to ensure adequate controls are in place including appropriate signage. Each installation must be for a 'specific purpose and legitimate aim as well as having to meet a pressing need'.
- 3.6.4 All new installations or upgrades will be considered and prioritised in conjunction with available intelligence, assessments of risk and available funding.
- 3.6.5 Staff with access to CCTV are appropriately trained and supervised to ensure compliant use of the systems and sharing of footage or imagery in line with statute and codes of guidance.
- 3.6.6 Release of data is strictly governed by UK GDPR 2018 where information is required to be disclosed by law or in connection with legal proceedings.

### **3.7 Playgrounds**

- 3.7.1 There are 41 play areas located on Council Housing Estates which are inspected on a rolling fortnightly basis by a small team of Inspectors based within the Green Spaces Team. These inspections are supplemented by quarterly and annual inspections by a service provider and combined they seek to ensure that repair issues are identified and completed in a timely manner and that play areas present as safe, attractive and well managed spaces for younger people.
- 3.7.2 The Green Spaces Team also lead on the Councils' play area refurbishment programme which is used to target limited resources into areas which are in greatest need and demonstrate local demand and use of play facilities.

### **3.9 Mobility scooters and electric scooters**

- 3.9.1 It is recognised that many residents now used powered vehicles to assist with mobility issues and for recreational and travel purposes. The storage of these vehicles must be within the home or in a designated area approved by the Council such as a secure store. The Council will not permit the storage of such vehicles to compromise the means of escape from blocks or flats or put residents at risk on health & safety grounds.
- 3.9.2 Charging or storage of vehicles in shared lobbies or corridors is not permitted.

### **3.10 Parking and Abandoned Vehicles**

We will advise new tenants if there is any parking attached to their tenancy. We do not normally designate communal parking spaces to individual residents except at some new build schemes where the parking bay is shown on a plan attached to the tenancy. On most of our estates our spaces are communal and available to all of our residents and their visitors, although those marked for blue badge holders are only available to those who are eligible.

Cars parking on Council housing estates should be roadworthy, have a valid MOT and vehicle tax.

The Tenancy Management Team will respond to irresponsible and nuisance parking and will work to resolve access problems for emergency and service vehicles. Vehicles which appear to be abandoned are managed by the Anti-Social Behaviour & Localities Team who will also respond to unauthorised trading or business operations being conducted from estate parking areas.

The Council reserves the right to amend local parking arrangements to meet the needs of residents and better management of limited off-street parking. This could include the introduction of controlled or managed parking schemes. Changes will only be implemented following consultation with those residents affected.

### **3.11 Gardens**

We expect residents to keep their private gardens tidy and maintain them to a reasonable standard so as not to permit them to become overgrown or impact adjacent properties or footpaths.

Support is available to residents who are unable to comply with their tenancy obligations due to underlying health issues or linked to age or infirmity. Further details on the Council's Garden Maintenance Service are available from [Tenancymanagement@hillingdon.gov.uk](mailto:Tenancymanagement@hillingdon.gov.uk) The menu of services available under the Service are chargeable. Charges are applied to the rent account and are payable along with all other rent and services charges due. Charges under the Garden Maintenance Service are not eligible charges for benefit purposes.

### **3.12 Anti- Social Behaviour**

3.12.1 The Council's Housing Management Service is comprised of a number of teams which have a clear focus on the tenant or leaseholder and issues which present 'within the home'. We know that there are also issues and behaviours which impacts the wider community. This includes anti-social behaviour and broader community safety issues which present on and across the shared areas of our estates.

If you are experiencing anti-social behaviour issues on one of our Housing Estates or with a Council tenant or leaseholder please contact us in one of the Following ways:

- email [asbriskmanagement@hillingdon.gov.uk](mailto:asbriskmanagement@hillingdon.gov.uk)
- call our contact centre on 01895 556666

3.12.1 These impacts and community safety concerns are more appropriately responded to by the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour & Localities Team. Their focus encompasses more complex incidents of anti-social behaviour which requires a multi-agency response. The overarching role of the team is to provide capacity to the Council in its landlord role and to lead a locality based problem-solving approach to identified and emerging issues with support from partners and communities.

3.12.1 The Anti-Social Behaviour & Localities Team will take the lead on a range of identified matters relating to both anti-social behaviour and broader community safety issues across the shared areas of estates. Central to this will be taking a lead and coordinating role in the development and delivery of time-limited 'Action Plans'. Matters which the Anti-Social Behaviour & Localities Team lead on could include:

- Problems presented by groups of people, including young people, on estates
- Where issues are impacting a locality rather than just an individual household
- Multifaceted problems where deployment of solutions is unlikely to involve actions by just one partner or team
- Where community engagement and support is key to better understanding issues and delivering resolutions
- Where presenting issues may be re-occurring or seasonal in nature and require solutions to 'break the cycle'.

### **3.13 Resident and Community Engagement**

The Council recognises that good quality estate environments can only be achieved by Council Services, partners and residents working together. The Council is committed to working in partnership with residents and groups of residents to realise our shared aspirations for our estates and neighbourhoods.

We expect our tenants and leaseholders, and those they invite onto our estates, to take responsibility for working with us in ensuring that our estates and communal areas are maintained to a good standard. This includes keeping their gardens clear and tidy, making proper use of the waste management facilities on the estate and disposing of large or bulky items appropriately, not string items on internal shared areas and fire escape routes, exercising due parental control over children on shared areas and being respectful to others and not causing a nuisance.

The Tenant Involvement & Empowerment Standard requires the Council to enable tenants and leaseholders with a range of opportunities to be involved in, and influence, policies, decisions and monitor and review performance. The Council is committed to meeting this Standard in the context of estate services.

The Council will provide residents with a range of involvement options, in line with our Tenant & Leaseholder Engagement Strategy, and provide relevant and timely information to support joint monitoring of the Estates Services Standard.

There will be an intelligence and resident led approach to triggering and developing time limited Action Plans where coordinated responses are necessary to deliver improvements and approaches to addressing presenting or emerging issues on estate.

## 4. Monitoring and Performance

Though 'special interest groups', the Council's website, the e-newsletter for residents and the annual report, the Council will work with residents to agree and bring forward meaningful and timely monitoring and performance information which can include but not be limited to:

- Satisfaction that the landlord keeps communal areas clean and well maintained
- Satisfaction that the landlord makes a positive contribution to neighbourhoods
- Completion of programmed inspections against the published schedule
- Estate Inspection outcomes [by element] against the Estate Services Standard
- Number of 'Action Plans' triggered, underway and completed
- Fire Risk Assessments completed against required frequency and outcomes
- Performance against statutory compliance obligations for water quality, gas, electrical and asbestos
- Service contract completion in line with scheduled requirements for communal electrical and mechanical plant and safety related systems

## 5. Training

The Council, in its capacity as landlord, recognises that staff are the key resource in ensuring effective estate services. In this context it is important that staff have the knowledge, confidence and skills to identify issues and take appropriate action. This resource extends to staff groups who are not directly responsible for the delivery of Estate Services but nonetheless visit properties on our estates on a regular basis and therefore have a real opportunity to contribute to identifying issues proactively, ensuring they are appropriately reported and raising standards.

All staff who visit our estates will receive training on estate services issues, including fire safety awareness, to enable and support them in making an effective contribution by putting their knowledge and skills into practice.

## 6. Equality and Diversity

The Council is committed to fairness and the principles of diversity and inclusion. Our aim is to ensure that our Policies and operational Procedures do not create an unfair disadvantage for anyone, either directly or indirectly. We are committed to:

- Consulting and engaging with residents, advocates, community organisations and forums by listening to their views, taking notice of the issues they raise and recognising their contribution to the delivery of Estate Services and wider Neighbourhood Management.
- Meeting the needs and choice of people from all backgrounds.
- Ensuring that our Services are relevant, responsive and sensitive to the needs of our existing and future residents.
- Ensuring that all sections of the community in which we operate have equal access to our services.

## **7. Accessibility**

We will ensure that tenants' needs are considered when implementing this Policy to ensure that they are treated fairly. We will make appropriate arrangements to ensure that customers with distinct communication needs are not unreasonably and disproportionately affected. This could involve providing communications in alternative languages or formats or providing interpretation or transcription as appropriate.

## **8. Data Protection and Information Exchange**

We will comply with our obligations under relevant data protection legislation and regulations. We will process and store personal information securely.

There are some circumstances in which we are required by law to disclose information given to us. We will normally discuss this with the party giving us the information, but this may not always be possible.

## **9. Reviewing our Policy**

To ensure that this Policy continues to reflect the current objectives and practice in respect of Estate Services, it will be reviewed every three years unless amendment is prompted by a change in legislation, Regulatory requirements, monitoring and reporting, or feedback from residents reveals that a change in Policy is required sooner.

## **10. Related Policies and Links to Further Information**

List of documents, associated policies and publications:

- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Tenant & Leaseholder Engagement Strategy
- Housing Management Offer to residents living in Council owned high rise accommodation
- Repair responsibility statement <https://www.hillingdon.gov.uk/non-emergencyrepairs>
- Fire Safety Policy
- Building Safety Policy
- The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- Estate Services Standard
- Tree Strategy 2023
- Practice Note – Storage of items on internal shared areas
- Consumer Standard: Neighbourhood & Community
- Consumer Standard: Safety & Quality
- Consumer Standard: Transparency, Influence and Accountability

## 11. Behaviours, Competencies & Professional Standards

The Council, in its capacity as landlord, recognises that staff are the key resource in ensuring effective estate services. The delivery of training to staff groups involved in the provision and management of Estate Services goes beyond ensuring that they have the knowledge and competence to deliver their roles.

The Council is committed to ensuring that all social housing staff have the skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours they need to deliver good-quality, professional services to tenants and leaseholders. The desired effects include an improved service to residents, with staff better equipped to manage risks to tenants' wellbeing, health and safety. Success will be indicated through reductions in complaints upheld specifically regarding poor service or poor complaint handling; and in the long term we expect that staff with the required level of skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours will contribute to an increase in tenant satisfaction scores. This includes perceptions associated with our management of shared areas, the contribution we make to neighbourhoods, our approach to handling anti-social behaviour and perceptions that homes are safe.

Governance			
<b>Effective from:</b>	11/06/2024	<b>Review Date:</b>	11/06/2027
<b>Policy Owner:</b>	Head of Housing Management		
<b>Policy Author:</b>	Head of Housing Management		
<b>Approved by:</b>	Cllr Lavery – Cabinet Member for Residents' Services		
<b>Version Number:</b>	1.01		