

Dover District Council

Neighbourhood Management Policy



2023

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Between 1 April 2011 and 1 October 2020 housing management services were delivered to Dover District Council (DDC) tenants and leaseholders by East Kent Housing (EKH) an arm's length management company (ALMO).

On 1 October 2020 Dover District Council brought its housing management service in house and since that time officers have been working with tenants to help improve services and to establish how tenants feel about their homes and neighbourhoods. To help in the preparation of this policy the views of tenants and leaseholders were sought through a full-scale tenant satisfaction survey which ran from June – August 2021. The feedback given through this, along with that shared with the Council by groups of engaged tenants has helped inform the development of this policy.

1.2 Purpose

This document sets out how the housing service intends to effectively manage council housing estates and communal areas to help create and sustain, safe and pleasant neighbourhoods for local communities.

It explains our approach to the management of our neighbourhoods including how we will involve tenants in estate improvements, and partnership work with other agencies concerned with the safety, security, and appearance of the neighbourhood environment.

This policy will be operated and published in compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing Neighbourhood and Community Standard, which requires registered providers of social housing in consultation with their tenants, to publish a policy for maintaining, managing, and improving the neighbourhoods associated with their homes.

1.3 Regulatory Standards

This Policy will be operated and published in compliance with the Regulator of Social housing Neighbourhood and Community Standard, which requires Registered Providers of Social Housing in consultation with their tenants, to publish a policy for maintaining, managing and improving the neighbourhoods associated with their homes.

2. Policy Objectives

The Council recognises that there is a clear relationship between the quality of the local environment and our tenant's overall quality of life.

The Covid 19 Pandemic has demonstrated how important it is to have strong, cohesive, and connected communities with access to open spaces and neighbourhoods that are well maintained attractive and clean for tenants to reside.

Our vision for our neighbourhood and properties is that they are safe, secure, and well looked after areas where the tenants who make up our vibrant, diverse communities want to live.

This document is intended to be used as guidance and compliments the Tenancy Agreement; it does not supersede it. We may on occasion need to deviate from this guidance and use our professional discretion on a case-by-case basis and where circumstances require it.

Our policy objectives are that:

- The housing service play a key role in keeping Council estates and communal areas clean, safe, well maintained and attractive places to live
- We work in partnership with our tenants, key local partners, contractors and other public bodies to achieve our objectives
- We set clear service standards for the maintenance and management of estates and communal areas
- We react promptly to reports of problems and where necessary enforce the terms of the tenancy agreement to manage the land we own
- We put customers at the heart of our services by encouraging active customer involvement and consultation on all aspects of neighbourhood management

2.1 How this policy will be delivered

This policy will be communicated to employees internally during team meetings and via our internal systems. It will be published on our dedicated 'Housing for Tenants' webpage to make sure it is easy for tenants, staff and stakeholders to access it.

If staff become aware that there are problems with effective operations of the policy or any of the associated procedures, they should report this to the Housing Services Manager who will discuss these with the Housing Policy Officer. This feedback will be incorporated into the policy / procedural review process explained in section 7.

Staff will be provided adequate and appropriate training to ensure that they are able to deliver the objectives and aims as stated in this strategy.

3. Definitions

DDC manages many communal areas throughout our estates including internal spaces in our blocks of flats and independent living schemes. This policy applies to areas that are the responsibility of the housing service and housing revenue account to maintain.

We define estates and neighbourhoods as localities where we own and manage a significant number of properties

We define communal areas as areas of land, managed by DDC which are shared by tenants, leaseholders and other visitors to the area. In our tenancy agreement communal areas are referred to as 'shared areas', and this includes both internal and external areas i.e., pavements, play areas, drying areas, or internal stairwells, landings, lifts etc

This policy applies to, but is not limited to the following

- Communal areas shared by tenants in our independent living schemes and general needs blocks of flats i.e., passageways, entrance halls, staircases, lifts, landings, bin store areas, scooter stores and sheds
- Shared social facilities i.e., lounges or kitchens
- External areas i.e., communal gardens, through routes and drying areas
- HRA owned land used for play areas and recreation
- Highways and pavements on HRA estates that are the responsibility of DDC to maintain

Communal areas, even those that are immediately outside of or adjacent to a tenant, leaseholder or freeholder property should not be seen as an extension of their property and should not be used for their exclusive use or for the storage of personal effects in particular where access to the communal area is required by other tenants

4. Policy Statements

4.1 Communal ground maintenance

DDC recognises that the green spaces and areas around our estates are an important part of making where our tenants live attractive.

DDC is responsible for managing the grass cutting and gardening arrangements across the District. Maintenance of communal grounds and greens spaces is managed by the Parks and Open Team.

We will ensure that we provide an efficient and cost-effective grounds maintenance service where borders and shrub areas are looked after according to the plant species and remain weed and litter free, that grassed areas are cut as appropriate during the different seasons and hard landscaped areas are free of debris.

4.2 Trees

DDC actively manages the existing tree population, ensuring that sector best practice guidelines and legislation are always followed, and that all trees on land owned by us are kept in an acceptable condition and do not put people or property at unreasonable risk.

We will continue to carry out inspections of trees to identify issues at the earliest possible time, so that preventative action can be undertaken where appropriate.

Only essential works will be undertaken to manage a tree. The type of works undertaken will depend on the location, species, and state of health of the tree.

Tenants are encouraged to consult our [webpage](#) for more information and how to report any concerns about trees.

4.2.1 Trees growing in tenant private garden

Tenants are not permitted to plant large types of trees in their gardens, for example leylandii, conifers, willow, oak, ash and so on, as these may damage the structure of the home and surrounding communal structures such as walls and fences. To plant a large tree type in a garden would be in breach of the Tenancy Agreement (3.8.9).

Where there are trees already growing in tenants own private gardens, they are their responsibility to maintain.

If DDC are required to organise work with contractors to carry out safety checks or removal, we may recharge the tenant the cost of this.

4.3 Play areas

Where we own play areas, we will ensure that they are safe to use, properly inspected and fit for purpose. We will carry out the following inspections

- Weekly visual inspections by DDC officers
- Six monthly inspections by DDC play specialist contractor
- Annual ROSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) inspections by independent body.

Our play areas and equipment are designed and installed in compliance with statutory requirements, legislation, and design standards.

We will ensure that all play area equipment is maintained in the appropriate condition using a combination of planned preventative maintenance and responsive repairs.

4.4 Communal repairs including lighting

The Council considers common areas to include, entrance doorways, corridors, stairs, bin stores, drying areas, pathways, and parking.

We will ensure that facilities are conveniently located; regularly inspected, maintained, kept clean, safe, and secure; promptly repaired, kept free of graffiti, litter, and unwanted items, and are adequately serviced and lit.

We will ensure that repairs to door entry systems, lighting, and fencing that we are responsible for etc are completed with identified timescales.

For general communal repairs, repairs to lighting on communal stairs and hallways, and communal doors the Council uses the Mears Group.

Tenants can report a communal repair direct to our contractors by going to our [report a repair](#) webpage.

4.5 Cleaning

We consider cleaning as keeping internal and external communal areas swept, mopped and free from litter and graffiti.

Where blocks of flats and other schemes have communal facilities such as a kitchen, laundry rooms and lounges we will ensure that they are well maintained.

We will ensure that the communal areas of our sheltered schemes, blocks, estates, and neighbourhoods are clean and safe.

We use contractors for cleaning the communal areas of our blocks of flats / maisonettes and the immediate surrounding areas, and this is carried out in accordance with their contractual obligations. More details about how we manage this contract and how tenants can report issues with the service can be found on our website.

We also expect our tenants, leaseholders, and other customers to play their part in keeping their neighbourhoods clean by disposing of unwanted items responsibly.

4.6 The storage of items in communal areas

Internal communal areas including landings, stairwells, under stair areas, balconies and entrance halls must always be kept clear of obstructions. Even the temporary storage of items in these areas poses a risk of fire and injury to other tenants and users of the space.

Items such as (but not limited to) rubbish and items awaiting disposal, mats and flowerpots, push chairs and prams, bicycles, motorised cycles and mobility scooters must never be placed or stored in communal areas, both internal and external, and if they are, members of the housing team will ask tenants to remove them. Failure to remove items as requested may result in their removal by the Council and the recharging of this cost.

External shared communal areas are intended for the enjoyment of both tenants and their visitors and any requests to make alterations to this space will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis by DDC.

4.7 Refuse and recycling

It is important that refuse and recycling is disposed of correctly and in a safe manner, in order to prevent unsightly estates and potential impacts to the health of our tenants.

The Council will publish details of collection dates for waste and recycling collection on our website.

The Council where possible will ensure that appropriate and well- sited facilities are provided for refuse disposal and recycling, and we will maintain communal bin stores where these have been provided.

All tenants are responsible for ensuring that their household rubbish is properly stored and disposed of. Refuse must be adequately bagged and stored or placed in bins provided until collection.

The Council will operate an education and enforcement approach to ensure that tenants meet their obligations as per their tenancy agreements in relation to disposal of waste.

For any rubbish that has not been disposed of correctly by a tenant, the Council may recharge the tenant for the costs of clearing the rubbish.

The Council will work with our contractors to ensure that the service provided for the collection of waste and recycling is collected on time, and that any delays or changes to these services are communicated effectively with our tenants.

4.7.1 Large items

Tenants are responsible for making their arrangements for the disposal of large items such as household furniture. These must not be left in inside or outside communal areas where they may pose a health and safety hazard.

Tenants are advised to check that the person or business collecting their items is authorised by the Environment Agency to collect or transport waste.

Tenants can check that their waste carrier has a license on the [Environment Agency website](#), or a search for licensed carriers can be done so [here](#).

4.8 Environmental crime including flytipping

We will take a robust approach to environmental crime of any kind on the estates we manage, and we will work closely with our Environmental Crime team and in collaboration with partnership agencies to investigate and resolve the causes of such crimes, which could include to legal action being taken against those committing such offences on our estates.

Types of environmental crime includes:

- Littering, including littering from vehicles
- Dog fouling
- Fly-tipping

Section 33 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, 'fly-tipping' is the illegal dumping of liquid or solid waste on land, water, or a site without a licence to accept the waste, and usually done so to avoid disposal costs.

Tenants who incorrectly dispose of their waste will be in breach of the tenancy agreement and DDC may decide to recharge the tenant for the costs of clearing the rubbish.

Where environmental offences, such as fly-tipping, are suspected appropriate enforcement action may be taken.

Tenants who witness fly-tipping should refer to the 'Taking Action' section on the Council's [webpage](#).

Tenants are encouraged to report any incidents of environmental crime to the Council online.

4.9 Pets and communal areas

Tenants who live in a home that does not have its own garden space, such as a flat, will need our permission to keep any pet that needs outdoor exercise. A condition of the permission will be that the pet must be always kept on a lead in the internal and external communal areas.

Tenants are responsible for any damage caused to their home or shared areas by any animal kept in the home or visiting their property.

Where permission is given to keep a pet in a property with a communal garden, tenants must not exercise their dog unsupervised.

Tenants who use the communal areas to exercise their pets are responsible for clearing any fouling it might make. This is to prevent any health hazards, including smells, and to prevent communal areas from becoming unsightly.

Fouling that is not cleared up will be in breach of this policy.

DDC will investigate any complaints or breaches in accordance with section 13 of our [Pet Policy](#).

At all times Tenants should refer to our [Pet Policy](#) and the [Tenancy Agreement](#).

4.10 Vandalism and graffiti

Vandalism is an act of deliberate or reckless damage or destruction to public or private property, which can pose a danger to communities, and is an illegal, anti-social activity.

Graffiti is the damage caused by spraying, writing, drawing, painting, soiling, defacing by whatever means, or otherwise marking public or private property without the owner's consent.

We take both acts seriously and consider such acts as a nuisance and anti-social behaviour. We may take enforcement action or as appropriate refer such offences to the Police and support a Police investigation under the Criminal Damage Act 1971.

Tenants are encouraged to report acts and incidents of vandalism and graffiti via our website.

It is important that tenants provide DDC with as much detail as possible, such as:

- where the vandalism or graffiti is located
- details about the words, pictures, or other physical damage
- if the graffiti is racist, offensive, or abusive
- if the damage could pose a danger to the community
- if you saw who carried out the graffiti or vandalism
- exact details, including street name
- your contact details (if applicable)

4.11 Security and anti-social behaviour

DDC recognises that nuisance and anti-social behaviour caused by a minority of tenants can be disruptive and distressing for neighbours, damage the sustainability of communities and adversely affect our ability to let our properties. We are committed to reducing anti-social behaviour on our estates and making them safe places to live, work and visit.

Wherever possible we will focus on preventative measures and early informal interventions and warnings to avoid the escalation of anti-social behaviour. When necessary, we will take enforcement action which will be measured, reasonable and proportionate, based on available evidence.

Where appropriate DDC may rely on the powers set out in the Housing Act 1985 (as amended by the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014) to obtain possession of a property using the absolute ground for possession. This ground is for serious cases of Anti-Social Behaviour. We will always consider whether this is a justifiable and proportionate response to the problem.

The Council has a dedicated [Neighbour Nuisance and Anti-Social Behaviour Policy](#) which explains our approach.

Tenants are encouraged to report incidents of anti-social behaviour to the Council:

- In person at one of our offices or during a scheduled visit by a member of our staff
- By telephone: 01304 821199; or
- Online using our [ASB reporting form](#) found on the DDC website.

4.12 Residential parking

In some locations DDC provide car parking facilities that are for the specific use of tenants of the building, their visitors and DDC staff (and contractors working on behalf of DDC) that may need to visit the building in the course of their duties.

Section 3.9 of the tenancy agreement has specific clauses related to tenant responsibilities for parking, for example not to park trailers, caravans, motor homes or commercial vehicles in the communal parking areas. Our communal parking spaces are not allocated and are used on a first come-first served basis.

All vehicles on our land should be taxed or registered SORN with the DVLA, insured, and have a valid MOT. We consider all vehicles parked on our land that do not meet these requirements to be causing a nuisance. We will take appropriate action to remove them in accordance with our procedures and government guidance and permit other authorised bodies such as the Police or DVLA to do likewise.

Further information can be found by visiting our [website](#).

4.13 Roads and paths

We aim to keep any roads or paths which are our responsibility (i.e. not adopted) clean and tidy, free from weeds and well maintained.

Because of the large number of trees on our estates we expect there to be a large amount of leaf fall. This is a natural occurrence and not something we can control or keep pathways free of.

Any trip hazards identified through our regular estate inspections will be reported including those that are identified on Kent County Council pathways and roads.

Pathways that provide access only to the households who share them and are not through routes open to the public are the responsibility of those that share them to maintain.

4.14 Abandoned vehicles

Abandoned vehicles can be dangerous, spoil the environment and can be an eyesore.

Tenants who wish to report an abandoned vehicle should complete an [online report](#).

We ask that before an abandoned vehicle is reported to us, that tenants collect as much information as possible. Over 90% of reports that the Council receive are for vehicles that are not abandoned.

When a vehicle is reported as abandoned, we will check to make sure that this is the case. We are not able to remove or dispose of the vehicle until this is clearly established. The Council will carry out the following steps and procedures:

- Checks are made through the DVLA, the vehicle is visited and assessed using the criteria as stated on our [webpage](#).
- If a vehicle is abandoned a 15-day notice will be placed on the vehicle.
- After the notice period has expired, and if the vehicle has not been claimed or moved, we will remove the vehicle. Once this has happened the vehicle will be under the jurisdiction of Kent County Council who decide which further action should be taken.

The Council only have the power to remove Abandoned Vehicles from the public highway or Council owned land.

If a vehicle is burnt out a 24 hours' notice will be applied prior to removal.

If a vehicle is considered to be dangerous this should be referred to the Police who have the power to remove the vehicle.

A vehicle that has Tax and a valid MOT can still be classed as abandoned. Tenants can make checks with the DVLA and if the Tax has expired and the vehicle is parked on the public highway the DVLA have the power to remove it.

4.15 Mobility scooters

Tenants are not permitted to store or charge their mobility scooters in internal or external communal areas of our buildings. In some instances, the Council provides facilities specifically designed for this purpose or on a case-by-case basis agrees proposed arrangements for the safe storage and charging of scooters. In these circumstances tenants will require the express permission of the Council to store and/or charge a mobility scooter.

Where permission has been given, tenants must always store and charge their mobility scooters in either the designated scooter facilities provided or an agreed storage area to minimise health and fire risk to other tenants. Storage or charging of mobility scooters outside of these areas may result in enforcement action being taken.

Tenants should always ensure that they have set the lowest speed setting possible whilst using their mobility scooter in communal spaces.

We will engage with and take appropriate enforcement action against tenants who store or charge their mobility scooters in communal areas or facilities without our permission. Such action could include, but is not limited to:

- the removal of the scooter with notice; or
- injunctive proceedings

The Council reserves the right to act without notice if the mobility scooter poses a serious fire and safety risk to other tenants, staff or contractors working on behalf of DDC, or in cases where any tenant continues to ignore previous notices and store or charge a mobility scooter in an area where no permission has been given.

4.16 External structures

Tenants should seek prior written consent from the Council before erecting any garages, greenhouses, or any other external structure.

All requests must comply with planning or other statutory regulations applicable.

4.17 Signage

We will ensure that signage on our estates is clear, necessary, appropriate, and well maintained and that health and safety and other mandatory signage is present where required.

Any unnecessary or outdated and obsolete signage will be removed or replaced if appropriate.

Tenants are encouraged to report damaged signage to the Council by completing an online form available on our web site.

4.18 Neighbourhood improvements

Neighbourhood improvements are planned works to the communal areas of estates intended to enhance the local environment.

We involve our tenants to maintain and improve neighbourhoods as well as working in partnership with other agencies concerned with safety, security, and appearance of the neighbourhood environment.

Every year the Council has funding to spend on small projects to make improvements to our communities through the [Environment Improvement Programme](#). The programme aims to improve the safety, appearance, cleanliness/tidiness and use of an area and contribute to the health and well-being of tenants

Tenants and leaseholders are encouraged to participate in this programme by submitting ideas for consideration.

4.19 Tenant insight and involvement

The Council is committed to ensuring that our tenants' voice is heard, and that issues and suggestions raised by tenants are listened to, and where appropriate, acted on.

We will work alongside tenants to define standards, assist in monitoring and managing contractor performance, and drive to positive future improvements to our estates and neighbourhoods through neighbourhood inspections.

In general, we will consult with our tenants on the quality of the services we provide and neighbourhood management using tenant satisfaction surveys. All satisfaction information will be reported to senior management and used to improve our strategies, procedures, and services.

We will also employ the use of transactional surveys to investigate the experience a tenant or leaseholder has had within a particular interaction. Information gathered from these surveys will provide us with quick actionable feedback and be used to help us improve services.

4.19.1 Dover District Tenant Consultative Group (DDTCG)

The DDTCG are a local non-political group of DDC tenants and leaseholders that represent the views and interests of tenants and leaseholders across the Dover District.

The group meets every 6 weeks to discuss local issues with DDC and have worked on many community projects to help improve estates for tenants who live there.

4.19.2 Tenant engagement strategy

The Council has a dedicated Tenant Engagement Strategy which details how we will work with and involve our tenants in voicing their thoughts and concerns on our neighbourhood management and housing services to ensure that maintenance of our properties and estates benefits our tenants.

A link to this document can also be found on our [webpage](#).

4.20 Partnership working

We recognise that high quality sustainable neighbourhoods can only be achieved if organisations work together. We are committed to developing positive working relationships with agencies such as neighbourhood police, other housing providers and local authorities so that we can realise the aspirations of our neighbourhoods.

We will expect our tenants and leaseholders to take responsibility for working with us in ensuring that the standards on our estates and communal areas remain high, for instance by keeping their own gardens clear and tidy, protecting the local environment, removing their rubbish responsibly, not causing nuisance with fire, keeping their pets under control, being respectful of others, not causing noise nuisance or anti-social behaviour, not storing belongings inappropriately etc.

5. Performance Management

5.1 Neighbourhood inspections

The Council's inspection schedule covers communal areas across the district where neighbourhoods and properties are managed by us.

The Council has a planned inspection schedule which can be found on our website. The frequency of the inspections is mainly determined by the property type and local factors such as Anti-social Behaviour. We reserve the right to carry out spot check inspections of our neighbourhoods and properties, with adequate notice given on the latter.

All neighbourhoods with communal areas or facilities will be inspected no less than twice a year.

Neighbourhoods where the Council does not own communal land or facilities will not have regular inspections but may still be inspected for management purposes.

Where a neighbourhood is assessed as unsatisfactory, we will take a planned approach with specific actions for improvement.

We offer a wide range of performance measures including Tenant Insight data to help improve services. This includes neighbourhood satisfaction, customer inspections and social media / digital engagement.

5.2 Response times

We aim to respond to emergency situations in our communal areas within 24 hours of the report being made (for example dangerous broken glass in communal windows).

All other non-urgent enquires and reports of problems will be responded to within 10 working days.

5.3 Service standards

We are committed to publishing details of our service standards on our website.

These include

- Grounds maintenance
- Cleaning
- Abandoned cars
- Estate inspections

5.4 Internal audits

The Council will conduct routine internal audits of its procedures to ensure that processes are adequate and efficient, and that staff understand them.

Where issues have been raised or found, the Council will work to rectify them.

6. Equality and diversity

This policy supports the Council's commitment to championing equality and ensuring procedures are in place, so all tenants and residents are treated fairly and without unlawful discrimination in line with the Equality Act 2010.

DDC will ensure that all services and actions are delivered within the contexts of the central principles of the Human Rights Act (1998) and that officers comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

7. Monitoring and review

Regular monitoring will take place to ensure Housing Services are dealing conducting and performing neighbourhood management in line with this policy.

The results will be used by Housing Services to enhance future policy reviews and continually improve service standards.

All reviews will consider whether:

- The current policy adheres to legislative and regulatory requirements and reflects current good practice
- The aims and objectives of the policy are being met
- The current policy outcomes meet the needs and aspirations of our tenant base
- Tenants are aware of and understand the policy and believe it to be consistent and fair
- The policy provides sufficient information to tenants and residents

Overall monitoring and review of the policy will be undertaken in consultation with:

- Staff
- Members
- Existing and future council tenants
- Tenant and community groups

This policy will be reviewed every two years or in line with legislative, regulatory and operational changes.

8. Associated documents, policies and procedures

While this document illustrates and explains how the Council will manage the maintenance, cleanliness and repairs of its properties and communities, it should be read alongside other documents which fit into the framework of Housing Management and Services.

Links to all our Housing Documents can be found on our [website](#).

