



# Fire safety policy

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## Glossary

<b>CBC</b>	Colchester Borough Council
<b>CBH</b>	Colchester Borough Homes
<b>COSHH</b>	Control of Substances Hazardous to Health
<b>RRFSO</b>	Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005

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## **1. Introduction**

As landlord of the premises covered by this policy, Colchester Borough Council has legal and moral obligations in relation to fire safety as outlined by the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.

CBC has appointed Colchester Borough Homes as agents to discharge their duties. Therefore, this policy describes the practices and procedures implemented by CBH to undertake this.

This document identifies the structure, procedures, and responsibilities of managing fire safety in accordance with legal requirements as delegated to CBH and covers the fire safety approach to all the dwellings and workplace facilities such as offices and workshops. This fire safety policy also forms part of the CBH overarching risk management strategy.

## **2. Purpose**

The consequences of a fire at any of the dwellings occupied by CBC tenants/or leaseholder can be especially serious due to the difficulties and dangers associated with the emergency evacuation of residents, some of whom may be highly dependent and lack physical or mental capacity. The aim therefore must be to ensure that, if possible, outbreaks of fire do not occur and that, when outbreaks do occur, they are rapidly detected, effectively contained, and quickly extinguished. This means that overall fire safety will depend on physical factors such as building construction, design, and maintenance, together with equipment and furnishings and proper use and maintenance of detection and alarm systems, and on local policies and staff training for handling emergencies.

Although evacuation from any of the non-dwelling buildings such as offices and workshops should be much simpler, poorly managed fire precautions could be just as catastrophic. Therefore, this policy equally describes procedures required in non-residential areas under the control of CBH.

## **3. Emergency response procedures**

### **3.1 Evacuation strategy**

The fire evacuation strategy for each building will be determined by fire risk assessment findings. The assessment process will consider the people at risk, where they are in the building, the fire risks that cannot be removed or reduced any further and the size, layout, and condition of the building.

The three evacuation processes that could be used:

1. Simultaneous evacuation
2. Progressive horizontal evacuation
3. Stay put

### **Simultaneous Evacuation**

This process involves everyone exiting the building, in response to a fire alarm activation, by walking through the escape routes in a calm and orderly fashion to the designated fire assembly point(s). For example, office spaces and buildings that do not have suitable fire control measures in place.

### **Progressive horizontal evacuation**

The process involves evacuating people into an adjoining fire compartment, at least 2 fire doors away from the fire on the same level, from which they can later evacuate to a place of ultimate safety. For example, extra care, a site that provides care 24/7, staff would be in place to assist with tenant evacuation.

### **Stay put**

Stay Put can be used for buildings that have a good standard of fire safety i.e. good compartmentation, fire doors and housekeeping etc. Staying put allows tenants to remain in their own flat in a relative place of safety in the event of a fire in another flat/area of the building. For example, general needs flat block, which meet a good standard of fire safety.

## **3.2 Evacuation of office buildings**

On hearing a fire alarm activation, employees and visitors must immediately evacuate the building without delay via the nearest fire exit. Once out of the building employees and visitors are to muster at the designated emergency assembly point. If safe to do so, trained fire marshals will check the fire alarm panel to confirm the location that the alarm was activated and conduct a sweep of all areas, including storerooms and toilets and report to the emergency co-ordinator/ fire services their findings. Under no circumstances is any person to re-enter a building until given express permission from the emergency coordinator.

## **3.3 Fires in external areas**

If you see a fire in an external area e.g. car parks, the alarm must be raised, either by breaking the nearest wall mounted “break glass” call point, or if none are present in the vicinity, or in isolated open car parks / grounds use a mobile phone to call emergency services on 999 and if appropriate shout “fire, fire”.

### **3.4 Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEP)**

#### **Employees and Visitors**

A PEEP must be produced for any member of staff or visitor who has a disability that could affect their ability to evacuate a CBH location. The plan will outline what additional measures or assistance is likely to be needed by the individual for them to evacuate safely. A “buddy system” might be required to ensure they are given assistance to evacuate in a fire situation. If a PEEP is not appropriate other measures will be put in place. PEEPs will be undertaken by the health and safety team, with consultation with the person requiring assisted escape and their line manager.

#### **Tenants**

CBH will ensure that all sheltered scheme tenants and any tenant within independent linked properties who are unable to self-evacuate, will have a Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP).

The PEEP will set out arrangements for an individual with physical, mental or other specific needs which may prevent them from safely evacuating the premises in the event of a fire. This information will be vital to the Fire Service in the event of an emergency situation.

## **4. Fire precautions and system testing**

### **4.1 Fire alarm testing**

On each site under the control of CBH, where a fire alarm system is in place there will be a weekly test of the system. Tests will be carried out at a specified time on the same day each week with records being kept locally. The alarms will be sounded for approximately four or five rings each test and the date/time will be advertised at the premises.

It is important to note that local individual fire alarm tests are undertaken on a rotational cycle at these times. Therefore, both staff and residents should not expect to hear their local alarm each week. This is to ensure that all call points are tested in rotation.

Please be aware that in agreement with Essex Fire and Rescue there are no fire detection units or call points in common areas of general needs flats. Smoke detection units inside the general need's flats are tested annually.

On hearing the alarm at any time other than advertised or the continuation of these alarms, employees/tenants are to respond in accordance with the fire procedure for their area, unless they have been specifically forewarned that there is to be an additional test.

Smoke detection units will be serviced at a minimum of an annual frequency by a competent person. If the fire risk assessment requires it, this may be a shorter frequency.

## **4.2 Fire door inspections**

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (Article 17) makes it a legal requirement to ensure that fire resisting doors and escape doors are adequately maintained.

### **Sheltered schemes**

All fire doors in sheltered schemes will be checked and inspected every 6 months.

### **General needs flats**

All communal fire doors in general needs flat blocks will be visually inspected by the CBH Community Caretaking team annually.

The inspection should include:

- (a) Are escape routes, including stairwells, corridors, doorways etc. Free from obstructions
- (b) Ensure that the hot and cold smoke seals are present and in good condition
- (c) The fire door closure where fitted is operating correctly
- (d) The fire door closes fully into the door frame
- (e) The gap around the fire door and door frame or where a set of double doors meet does not exceed 3-4mm
- (f) There are no punctures/holes or excessive damage to the door/door frame

Any fire door defects or escape route obstructions identified will be logged in the site fire logbook and must reported to the appropriate person/team.

## **4.3 Fire extinguishers and sprinklers**

Fire extinguishers will be tested and maintained in accordance with manufacturer service requirements. Each extinguisher will be inspected annually via a nominated competent contractor and will bear a label displaying the date of the most recent inspection.

The adequacy of fire extinguisher coverage is reviewed annually as part of the fire risk assessment process and additional reviews made as necessary if there is a change of use, increased risk or new equipment or processes.

P50 fire extinguisher units are in place in many of the staff-based locations. These units are exempt from testing as they have a 10-year warrantee. All P50

units in our premises will be either refurbished or disposed of after a 10-year period.

A limited number of sprinkler systems are in place at relevant properties. These will be serviced annually by a competent person.

#### **4.4 Emergency lighting**

Emergency light testing (flick test) will be completed monthly by CBH employees to briefly check that all luminaries are in place, working and clean with findings recorded in the site fire logbook.

Quarterly testing and annual servicing will be undertaken by an appointed competent contractor.

#### **4.5 Controlled access to restricted areas**

Where it has been determined that access to a restricted area of a CBH building is required by contractors/external workers, additional control measures to manage this have now been implemented.

Loft access hatches will now be padlocked shut with signage displayed on each hatch. The signage will detail that the area is restricted and who to contact for access.

Keys to access restricted loft areas will be master keys and held on each site and by responsible persons.

This will allow CBH to have a controlled access process to prevent unauthorised entry and building damage.

### **5. Fire precautions & high risks**

This section highlights high fire risk issues and how CBH takes its approach to minimise the risk.

#### **5.1 Arson**

The risk of arson is ever-present and is still the biggest cause of fires in non-domestic premises in the UK. The most effective tactic to employ against the arsonist is to deny the opportunity. Careless disposal of combustible materials outside a building or in a common area is an encouragement to the arsonist and should be avoided. When safe to do so unfamiliar faces or persons without relevant identification should be challenged to identify themselves and any failure to do so satisfactorily reported immediately to the person in charge and/or the health and safety team.

Service managers and others having responsibility for buildings or parts of buildings must ensure that the potential for arson is recognised and taken fully

into account and where necessary improvements made. Advice is available from the CBH health and safety team as required.

Following a fire started under suspicious circumstances, or where arson is suspected, managers are to ensure that the scene and material evidence in any form is left undisturbed pending investigation by the relevant authority. Any personnel with involvement in the fire incident should be released from duty and made available for immediate interview by the authorities.

## **5.2 Smoking materials**

The use of smoking materials including e-cigarettes is not permitted within any of the common area of residential buildings that CBH have responsibility or areas such as doorways and windows that are adjacent. The use of smoking materials including e-cigarettes is not permitted in any area that employees work, this includes all staff-based buildings, outside areas and company vehicles. The charging of e-cigarettes is also not permitted in any of the aforementioned areas. Illicit smoking has the potential to pose a significant fire risk and is to be treated seriously with appropriate actions taken to enforce the no smoking policy.

Under no circumstance must a resident or tenant be allowed to smoke or use/charge an e-cigarette whilst using or being near medical gases.

## **5.3 Medical gases**

Signage must be placed on the main door to any resident or tenant abode that uses medical gases such as oxygen as well as the main entrance door to the building.

Tenants/leaseholders must inform CBH if they are using or going to use medical gases.

## **5.4 Hot works**

All hot works in areas under the control of CBH must be completed by competent person(s) from an approved contractor. A safe system of work must be in place, along with a hot work permit to open and close the task.

## **5.5 Hazardous substances**

The amount of flammable substances being stored should be kept to a minimum and stored in a cool, well ventilated secure area, preferably one reserved for the storage of flammable substances and having adequate low-level ventilation.

Aerosol cans or gas bottles must not be exposed to excessive heat, for example direct sunlight or radiators

Flammable substances must be handled and stored carefully and in accordance with the manufactures instructions to avoid damage and never used near naked flames or other sources of ignition. An aerosol canister must not be operated when it is damaged. Manufacturers' warnings printed on the container must always be observed. Containers are to be sealed or capped immediately after use and not be left standing in direct sunlight or where they may be knocked over.

The health and safety team must be made aware of any new substances being used by CBH employees, so a Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH) risk assessment can be undertaken. It is employees' responsibility to read and comply with COSHH risk assessments with a view to fire safety. CBH COSHH risk assessments will be shared with each team to ensure control measures are followed; master copies can also be viewed Sharepoint.

COSHH risk assessments undertaken by contracted cleaning companies are stored locally at each site. Contractors working on voids or sites must have COSHH risk assessments in place and available in site safety folders.

## **5.6 Electrics – Portable appliance testing (PAT)**

All electrical items used in common areas must have a PAT via a competent person or company before use. Unauthorised electrical appliances must not be used in common areas of any of the premises. Further PAT are undertaken at intervals set via risk assessment but no greater than a three-year cycle.

On discovering any faulty/ damaged electrical equipment, employees must stop using the office or trade equipment, remove/mark out of use and report the issue to their line manager.

The use of block electrical plugs is not allowed in any areas under the control of CBH. Strip plugs can be used if they are not adjoined (daisy chained) and have a current PAT in place.

## **5.7 Cooking appliances**

Microwaves, kettles, and toasters are to be used only in authorised areas with appropriate fire detection i.e. kitchens or rest rooms.

Cooking appliances in commercial kitchens are included as part of the fire risk assessment process. Procedures in the management of kitchen equipment must ensure they are under a robust system of test and maintenance.

Care is to be taken with toasters and microwaves to prevent food stuffs being burnt that may activate a smoke detection and cause unwanted fire alarms. It is recommended the toaster crumb trays are emptied/cleaned regularly to guard against unwanted fire alarms.

The areas where cooking takes place, such as a kitchen must be fitted with heat sensor detection and the door kept closed to prevent any smoke from cooking activating smoke detection outside of the area.

The location of toasters and microwaves is to be away from combustible materials and not placed next to notice boards with paper attachments and care taken when used under wall mounted cabinets.

## **6. Compartmentation**

All walls, floors and ceilings to compartments should be sealed to form protection against the spread of fire and smoke. Where there are penetrations to such compartments (e.g. to run cables or piping), these should be fire sealed after the work is completed.

Each project must have works checked and signed off to ensure identified compartment breaches have been correctly fire stopped where penetrations have occurred.

All compartment fire stopping works must be completed by trained CBH employees or authorised accredited contractors.

### **6.1 Means of escape**

It is in the interest of all interest that buildings have good efficient fire precautions, everyone can help by taking the following action:

- Do not allow items that will obstruct or slow down evacuation, or combustible materials to be placed on escape routes
- Do not wedge/prop open fire doors
- Do not secure or obstruct doors on escape routes so they cannot be opened easily by those making an escape
- Do not obstruct signs that show escape routes, fire alarm call points or extinguishers
- Do not allow holes or gaps in walls and floors to develop. This would allow the spread of smoke and heat. Defects must be reported to the Property Services.

## **7. Fire risk assessments (FRA)**

To control fire safety risks Colchester Borough Homes will practice a stringent programme of fire risk assessments for Sheltered housing, General needs flats and office spaces.

Fire risk assessments are undertaken by the Health and Safety team or a by an external fire risk assessment company/individual. All external fire risk assessors must be reviewed first to ensure they are competent and have the experience of undertaking fire risk assessments for CBH business and premises.

All fire risk assessments will be an intrusive assessment, meaning a fire door audit including 100% of all communal doors and a 25% sample of the tenant's

front doors (if access is permitted). The building assessment will also include external areas, compartmentation, roof voids, service risers and high-risk rooms/areas.

Each assessment will be treated as a living document and must be reviewed after any change to fire legislation, fire incident internally or externally that could affect a CBH premises, corrective works are completed, or new processes equipment/electrical goods/machinery is introduced to the location.

### **7.1 Sheltered housing**

Fire Risk Assessments to be carried out every 3 years and reviewed annually, this programme will be completed by the in house CBH Health and Safety team or an appointed Fire risk Assessor.

The frequency of review considers the management controls for fire safety at each location, including routine fire safety inspections and planned preventive maintenance programmes.

If there is a fire incident/emergency, external visit where concerns have been raised (fire officer) any building alteration or significant changes to the use of the building, a review of the assessment will be undertaken immediately. If no change triggers a review, the assessment will be reviewed annually.

Fire risk assessment documentation will be kept in the grey lockable fire boxes located at each scheme, electronic copies of the document are held by the Health and Safety team.

### **7.2 General needs flats**

Fire Risk Assessments will be completed on a rolling schedule over a 5-year period, this programme will be managed by the CBH Health and Safety team.

The Fire Risk Assessment schedule works in conjunction with the ongoing fire safety inspections of the common parts and planned preventive maintenance programmes.

Visual inspections of common parts of the blocks are undertaken by the CBH Community Caretaking team annually, with additional ad hoc inspections in place if fire safety concerns are reported to CBH or noted by the team.

### **7.3 CBH Offices**

Fire Risk Assessments in CBH office environments will be carried out every 3 years and reviewed annually, this programme will be completed by the in house CBH Health and Safety team or an appointed Fire risk Assessor.

## Policy Statement

Colchester Borough Homes agrees to:

- Bring the fire safety policy and any revisions to the notice of all staff, relevant contractors, the board, tenants/leaseholders, and anyone other relevant person having business on premises under our control
- Make the policy available to any person who may wish to consult it and place copies for reference on the CBH website.
- Pledge its commitment to adopt the requirements of The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order, and to comply with all relevant statutory requirements in respect of fire safety for the areas under our control and make CBC aware if any breaches in areas that they have responsibility for.
- Involve and enlist the support of employees and tenants in achieving fire safety objectives
- Monitor the effects of this policy and present the results in a published annual health and safety report.

## 8. Scope

The scope of this policy includes all employees carrying out their duties, tenants, leaseholders, contractors, visitors, and any persons that may be on premises under the control of CBH. This fire safety policy covers all premises, fixtures and fittings or items that are fire safety related.

## 9. Roles and responsibilities

The **Chief Executive** has overall responsibility for CBH performance in respect of fire safety.

The Director of Operations has direct responsibility for fire safety including but not exhaustively:

- Fire safety issues and activity in conjunction with the Health and Safety Manager
- Ensuring that at least annually, a report is presented to the Board of CBH
- Ensuring that agreed programmes of investment in fire precautions and training are properly accounted for.
- Ensuring that future developments & project works comply with this policy
- Ensuring the appropriate inspection, testing and maintenance of firefighting equipment and associated fire precautions infrastructure are carried out.

The **Health, Safety, Environmental & CDM Manager** is responsible for including but not exhaustively:

- Updating the board and senior management of the current state of fire safety in all premises for which CBH is responsible
- Ensuring the effective upkeep of the fire safety policy established for all the premises Colchester Borough Homes have responsibility for.
- Preparing regular fire safety updates to the board as part of the health and safety report.
- Facilitating all staff to participate in fire safety training and fire drills/instruction in accordance with this policy. With enhanced training being given to nominated fire marshals and others on request of management
- Review reports and investigate all fire incidents.
- For advising on all matters concerning fire precautions and situations in premises which do not conform to recognised fire standards or requirements, and for preparing and delivering reports containing recommendations for improvements.
- For advising on fire precautions arrangements for new or altered existing premises.
- For liaising, with the Fire Authority and other relevant statutory bodies having advisory or mandatory consequences over fire precautions in premises.
- For ensuring that periodic visual inspections of premises under the control of CBH are carried out.
- For ensuring that a suitable and sufficient fire risk assessments are undertaken as outlined in this policy

In conjunction with senior management for ensuring the appropriate inspection, testing and maintenance of firefighting equipment, fire alarm systems, emergency lighting and associated fire precautions infrastructure are carried out.

**Senior Managers** are responsible for including but not exhaustively:

- Bringing the existence and contents of the fire policy to the attention of those employees for whom they are responsible and to ensure that individual members of staff understand their duties and responsibilities in the event of fire.
- Support and promote the nomination and training of fire marshals in their workplace working with the Health and Safety Manager.
- Monitor and manage compliance of staff to attend mandatory fire training as recorded by the human resources department.
- To ensure that any contractors working in areas covered by this policy have relevant risk assessments in place for their tasks, are suitably trained and have been made aware of localise fire safety and evacuation procedures.

**All employees** of CBH have a responsibility to:

- Attend fire safety training as set out in this policy
- Take time to understand fire hazards of their working environment
- Practice and promote fire prevention and report any items left on evacuation routes that breach the “sterile area” policy or create a fire hazard
- Report any fire related incidents, hazards and near misses via the health and safety reporting system and in the case of a serious situation immediately to management / the health and safety team
- Co-operate with management to ensure that rules and regulations regarding fire safety are effective
- Not interfere with anything provided for fire safety
- Co-operate with practice fire evacuation “drills”.

## **10. Tenant and leaseholder responsibilities**

**Tenants and leaseholders** must comply to the relevant sections of this policy that include but not exhaustively

- Not interfering with or replacing without express permission any door, window, or part of the structure of the premises they are living in that directly protects an emergency escape route
- Not holding/wedging open any fire doors, either to their own premises or in common areas
- Report any fire related incidents, hazards and near misses to CBH. This includes items stored in common areas i.e. corridors and landings.
- Not storing or leaving any items in common areas of the building they reside in
- Not storing or charging a mobility scooter in any area without the express permission of CBH, this includes common areas, the premises they live in and outside areas adjacent to the building.
- Not storing large quantities of flammable materials in their place of residence
- Although smoking and using/charging e-cigarettes is permitted in tenants’/leaseholders’ individual homes, this is not allowed in common areas inside the buildings or any undesignated areas outside
- Making CBH aware if they are using/ storing medical gases such as oxygen, by having an appropriate sign displayed on their front door.
- Co-operate with the local evacuation policy for the building they reside in.
- To report any building defect repairs to CBH.
- Leaseholders are to provide an annual gas safety inspection certificate.

## **11. Training**

It is a mandatory requirement that all staff, without exception, undergo training in fire precautions. Training required will be appropriate to the employee's role but at minimum fire procedures training will be given on local and safety inductions.

The health and safety team and E-Learning system will provide fire safety training as required/requested to meet the induction and mandatory fire safety training requirements.

All appointed fire marshals, visiting officers and community caretakers must attend fire marshal training. Refresher training will be delivered every two years.

As part of the ongoing employee fire safety training, all employee-based buildings will have 6 monthly unadvertised practice evacuations "drills". Results of the drill will be recorded and a full debrief with the health and safety team and fire marshals undertaken. Failure to co-operate with the drill could lead to disciplinary action.

### **Fire safety awareness communication**

The health and safety team will aim to increase the awareness of its tenants towards general fire safety by providing information through Housing News and Views, leaflets, posters, social media, welcome packs, and other resources seen as appropriate.

## **12. Incident reporting**

All fire incidents and events that have the potential to cause a fire are to be reported using the health and safety reporting system. It is the responsibility of all staff to report incidents or near misses using the system. Serious incidents must be reported immediately via phone or in person to senior management and the health and safety team.

The investigation by the health and safety team will allocate the appropriate risk score for the event and if required actions will be set to reduce the likelihood of a reoccurrence.

All major fire incidents will be reported to senior management, the board and Colchester Borough Council.

## **13. Monitoring & review**

This policy will be monitored by incident data and training compliance figures produced by the HR department. These will feature in reports going to senior management, the board and both the Health and Safety Liaison Committee and Fire Safety groups.

The policy will be reviewed at 3-year intervals or if there is a significant change to legislation or CBH practice and procedures.

## **14. Equality and diversity**

Colchester Borough Homes are committed to the provision of a service that is fair, accessible and meets the needs of all individuals.

## **15. References**

- Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- HM Guide for sleeping accommodation
- LG fire safety guide for purpose-built blocks of flats.

## **16. Related documents**

- Health & Safety Policy Statement
- Strategic Health & Safety Policy.

## Document control sheet

<b>Title</b>	CBH Fire Safety policy					
<b>File location</b>	<a href="https://colchbh.sharepoint.com/sites/fnc/corpdoc/PolDevLib/CBH%20Fire%20Safety%20policy.docx">https://colchbh.sharepoint.com/sites/fnc/corpdoc/PolDevLib/CBH Fire Safety policy.docx</a>					
<b>Consultation</b>	CBH – CMT Essex Fire Service Head of Repairs & Maintenance					
	Board 23/02/2021					
<b>Next review</b>	01/02/2024					
<b>Circulation method</b>	SharePoint					
<b>Equality Impact Assessment</b>	<b>Required</b>	Yes	<b>Latest</b>	[Latest EqIA (Full)]	<b>Review due</b>	[EqIA Review Due (Full)]

## Document amendment history

Version	Type	Date	Notes
1.0	New	April 2018	New policy
1.1	Minor amends	July 2019	Addition of references to visitors at the request of Board members (Board meeting July 2019)
1.2	Policy amendments	Jan 2021	Policy update and content changes.