



**Soha Housing
Tenant Inspectors Report No 5
Estates Maintenance Cleaning of Communal Areas
June 2008**

Contents

	Page
Jargon Buster	2
1. Introduction	3
2. What we did and who was involved	4
3. Desk top review	5
4. On-site checks	6
5. Contractor Interviews	8
6. Staff interviews	11
7. Tenants' Interviews	13
8. Cleaning contract review	14
9. Conclusions	19
10. Recommendations	20
11. Acknowledgements	22
12. Appendix	23

Jargon Buster

KLOE – Key Lines of Enquiry

KLOEs are detailed questions that the Audit Commission use when inspecting a housing association.

IBS – International Business Systems.

A database which is used by many housing associations.

1. Introduction

The inspection team chose to inspect estates with the focus on the cleaning of communal areas in sheltered schemes and blocks of general needs flats. This is an area of concern for residents since the new way of administering the service charge was introduced. It was felt this would be an appropriate time to inspect this process, ensuring that the service gives value for money. The 'Estate Management' section of the Audit Commission KLOE 6 (see Appendix i) was used as guidance for the questions asked.

We specifically wanted to find out if Soha is getting value for money in maintaining the cleanliness of communal areas.

We also wanted to know:

1. How and why the contractors were chosen?
2. Are the contractors fulfilling their contract?
3. Are the contractors' specifications adequate?
4. Are the tenants satisfied with the service?
5. Do they know what to expect from the service?
6. How do Soha check on the quality of the service?
7. When does information on expected standards go out to tenants?

2. What we did and who was involved

Members of the inspection team were Carole Burchett, Bertie Doy, Freda Griffiths, Sharon Oakes, Katie Robertson and Roy Sadler. The activities carried out during the inspection are discussed in depth in the body of the report. It was agreed to look at the following aspects:

- The Contracts
- Soha's Policy and Procedures
- Contractor's Procedures
- Tenant information and involvement
- Tenant satisfaction
- Is the service provided excellent?

Area of inspection:	Inspected by:
Desk top review	All team members
Contract reviews	Katie Robertson
Staff interviews	Sharon Oakes, Freda Griffiths
Contractor interviews	Freda Griffiths
Tenant telephone interviews	Carole Burchett,
On-site inspection and tenant interviews	Bertie Doy, Roy Sadler
Collation of information and reports	Carole Burchett
Report writer	Freda Griffiths
Soha liaison	Catherine Little, Gillian Weatherley

3. Desk Top Review Report

The Desk Top Review was shared by several members of the team. The whole team looked at the Estate Management and Communal Areas Policy, P029 (See Appendix ii) which refers to the cleaning of communal areas in sheltered schemes and general needs blocks of flats. This policy was under review at the time of our inspection. We believe it has since been satisfactorily updated and ratified by the Soha Board.

Soha have undertaken a comprehensive survey of tenants in sheltered schemes and general needs flats, where they provide a cleaning service. This information is currently being evaluated by Soha. We would like to be informed of their findings, and any improvements made to their service as a result of this consultation. We would also like to receive a copy of Soha's feedback to tenants.

The contracts of Soha's Estate Caretakers and those awarded to the cleaning contractors were reviewed in depth and are reported upon separately.

Computer based information. Currently there are no records or procedures on the IBS system which cover the cleaning of Communal Areas.

KLOE 6 includes guidance on Estate Management and we were guided by this in our considerations.

Conclusions

At commencement of their tenancies, tenants are notified of the standard of cleaning service. Copies of contractor's responsibilities are posted on communal notice boards but there are no separate leaflets for easy reference.

It would be more reliable to have a system of records and procedures on the IBS system.

Recommendations

That records are introduced to the IBS system.

That easy reference information leaflets are introduced.

4. On-site checks

General observations

Thirteen establishments, selected at random, were visited to inspect the standard of cleanliness in the community areas. Of these, seven were establishments of sheltered accommodation five of which had its own community room facility included in the cleaning contracts.

These visits were made during one whole day and two half day periods.

All sheltered establishments were found to be maintained to a high standard of cleanliness with the exception of A. Road.

The condition of the communal areas on the A Estate and at the B Road Flats in Y town gave cause for immediate concern. This was not so much due, to the way in which the cleaning contract was carried out, but the way in which the contractor was prevented from carrying out a satisfactory service. Suggested answers to help to alleviate this problem can be found in Appendix iii. of this report.

Cleaning and Service Charge Notices were not being displayed at a number of establishments that were visited.

A notice should be placed at all establishments, warning the residents that personal items should not be left in walkways of communal areas, as any resulting accidents caused by these obstruction would render them legally responsible.

It would appear, that sub-contracting is being carried out in some areas, which may be due to various factors such as distance, onerous tasks and working hours. These are problems which should be taken up with the contractors by their employer.

It is important that the appendices should be read in conjunction with this report.

We recommend that consideration be given, to the suggested items referred to in Appendix iii. and Appendix iv. We also recommend that the observations listed in Appendix v. be referred to the appropriate department for consideration.

Recommendations

1. Post a schedule of dates when cleaners will be working in each of the premises.
2. Arrange for special notification when cleaners need to work out of usual hours.
3. Individual security '*lock ups*' should be provided for tenants to rent for storage of bicycles, push chairs etc.
4. Consider appointing '*Tenant Wardens*' who would work with Housing Officers towards enforcing conditions of tenancy thereby helping to clean up and not obstruct communal areas.
5. Make provision for light fittings in communal areas to be cleaned and inspected for safety and efficiency on a regular cyclical time table.
6. Set up a recorded procedure for Housing Officer visit requests, to deal with breaches of tenancy terms.
7. Display prominent, permanent notices on health and safety issues concerning obstruction of communal areas. Make clear in the event of accidents caused by this practice, they could be legally responsible for any compensation claims.
8. As a direct result of our visiting the establishment listed in Appendix vi, it is recommended that consideration be given to the carrying out of General Inspections covering all matters which take place within all communal areas. These should be carried out by Tenant Inspectors, bi-annually or annually.

Bertie Doy and Roy Sadler
March 2008

5. Contractor Interviews

BCB

Interview with a member of staff and a sub contractor from M & M Cleaning.

General cleaning only, windows are cleaned by Kings Windows.

Generally things go well for the sub-contractor and her co-worker. She is unable to follow all the terms of the contract as she doesn't have access to hot water. She mops floors and washes window frames and sills and door frames with detergent and cold water.

She is unable to vacuum where residents have placed carpets and door mats outside their doors, as they frequently expect her to, as there is no electricity supply in the communal halls and stairways. However she sweeps the whole area and makes sure all the refuse is removed.

Landings are frequently blocked by full refuse bags which tenants leave in communal areas until refuse collection day, instead of taking them into the bin store on a regular basis. The worst example of this is A Road, Y Town. This constitutes Health and Safety Issues and hampers her work.

She commented that C. Close and A. Road flats are very difficult to clean. Residents are not taking pride in their environment or non-residents are entering and misusing communal areas. In the case of A. Road, there is generally a strong smell of smoke and cigarette butts littering the floor. Is this breaking Health and Safety laws? At C. Close, residents are reluctant to use the bin stores and dump refuse bags beside the main entrance path and door. The area is frequently used for fly tipping.

When she finishes cleaning in a property, she completes a form stating that the cleaning has been carried out on that date and whenever possible, looks for a resident to countersign and the form is placed on the building's communal notice board. She completes a form for submission to Soha for payment. On the reverse of the form she notes items of maintenance that require attention i.e. replacing light bulbs. She wanted to emphasise there are generally insufficient storage areas for recycling materials.

Aim High

The contractor is very happy with the contract and dealing with Soha generally. Communication is good but falls down when Soha have other contractors in the building doing maintenance work which makes it difficult for him to carry out his work. He would like to receive advance notice of such works so he can reschedule the cleaning. There is no set procedure for reporting back to the Estates Manager i.e. for minor repairs or maintenance. He doesn't clean out the light fittings but has noticed several fittings are damaged and need replacing, however, he is not adverse to this being included in his contract in the future. He said, *"In several buildings there are Health and Safety issues on the landings, dumping furniture and residents' carpets outside their doors. Pushchairs and cycles are left particularly in main doorways."*

He has compiled a form for Aim High to complete stating that the cleaning has been carried out on that date. He seldom can find a resident to countersign but posts it on the communal notice board.

Clean Genie

The contractor works alone but can call in other staff. She finds her work is hampered as she doesn't have a pass key to sheltered schemes. To overcome the lack of hot water supply and electricity in general needs properties, she carries a small generator to power a vacuum cleaner and a hot water tank in her vehicle. A vacuum cleaner is required (although not mentioned in the contract) as residents in two blocks of flats have carpeted their landings. Rubbish bags are being stored on landings instead of being taken to bin stores, hampering her work and causing Health and Safety issues.

She fills out a form saying the cleaning has been done that day and puts it on the communal notice board. She can seldom find a resident to countersign the form. The completed form is returned to the Estates Manager but doesn't report any minor maintenance required.

This company also clean the windows in the schemes, she can call in help from other Clean Genie employees and also use appropriate window cleaning machinery. She has difficulty with one Wallingford location where a tenant has made a gated garden around their ground floor windows and she is unable to gain access.

Kings Cleaners (Window Cleaning)

No dates for interviews could be arranged.

Conclusions

The contracts seem to be working well in most ways. Each contractor has their own design of form for posting on the communal notice boards, this should be standardised. A procedure for reporting defects, particularly those that are urgent is lacking. Soha also need to liaise with contractors regarding other contractors working in a location where cleaning is scheduled to take place. There are common factors where tenants are breaking their terms of tenancies, with regard to placing personal items in the communal areas i.e. carpets, prams, pushchairs, bicycles and storing rubbish bags on landings. Fly tipping in communal areas is a common factor in all areas.

Recommendations

1. Soha design and issue a standard completion form for posting in each property.
2. Soha investigates the use of a protective frame for the above forms.
3. Set up a standard procedure for the reporting and recording of defects, particularly those requiring urgent attention.
4. Set up a recorded procedure for notifying the appropriate Housing Officer when visits are required, to deal with breaches of tenancy terms.
5. Communicate with contractors, when other contractors have work in a property, when cleaning is scheduled on the same date.
6. Consider installing covered re-cycling bin stores where they are not already in place.
7. Review security measures where it appears that communal areas are being used by non-residents.

Freda Griffiths
April 2008

6. Staff Interviews

Estate Caretakers' Interviews

Both of Soha's Mobile Caretakers attended this interview. They are very dedicated to their job and are prepared to go further than their contract of employment asks them to do. They are prepared to help vulnerable residents with small odd jobs when they are able to. This helps to keep the estates in the best possible condition.

They have a rough schedule which requires them to visit each of Soha's estates on a cyclical rota. However the nature of the job requires them to visit locations outside of the rota sequence in response to calls from residents. The majority of calls require them to collect bulk items that have been '*Fly Tipped*' on Soha property and take it to the nearest SODC tip. They do ensure that every estate is visited on a regular basis despite the frequent interruptions to the planned work.

During their work they find that residents are not adhering to terms of tenancy, particularly in blocks of flats with communal areas, i.e. staircase, landings and hallways. The main problem being the storage of refuse, residents should take refuse bags straight to bin stores but frequently it is allowed to build up on the landings until bin day comes round (or longer). Despite blocks of flats being provided with bin stores refuse is frequently dumped haphazardly round the area and not in the bins provided.

In some instances dog fouling occurs and walls become stained and marked with various substances.

They check on the general well being of the areas and carry out maintenance where possible, or report jobs back to their manager. Although not in their contract, light bulbs are checked and replacements supplied where required. Cobwebs and insects are removed at this point.

There are several suggestions that they make to improve the service, i.e. provide covered areas for storing of recycling bins, asking SODC to provide regular skip facilities in each area for bulky household items, (as supplied in Berinsfield, Didcot and Woodcote on a weekly basis). These collections go to landfill not recycling. On occasions residents donate items that are suitable for storing and donating to other residents that find themselves in need of help, i.e. after fire, flood or other trauma. They administer

the store and delivery of these household items when they are needed.

Conclusions

We found that our Estate Caretakers give more than is asked of them in their job specification. Their enthusiasm and dedication to their work is commendable. They provide an excellent service.

Recommendations

1. Consider adding '*The servicing of light fittings, changing of defunct light bulbs when required*' to their job specification.
2. Investigate provision of SODC weekly collections of bulk items in all areas and publishing them on communal notice boards.
3. That a procedure is put in place for the reporting of repairs, and requesting Housing Officers actions.
4. Provide covered storage areas for recycling bins.
5. Increasing this excellent service as soon as budget is available.

7. Interviews with tenants by telephone.

Telephone interviews took place with tenants from 3 different locations.

All of the tenants spoken to were satisfied with the standard of the cleaning.

They did not necessarily always see the cleaners working but knew that it was done and was done satisfactory. One tenant was not sure that the cleaning was done fortnightly and felt it was more like 3 or 4 weekly.

Only one tenant was sure that they had seen a copy of the cleaning standard and one commented that the cleaning schedule displayed was out of date.

Conclusion

It would seem that, generally, all the tenants spoken to were happy with the cleaning of their communal areas. There were some problems around whether they had seen copies of the standard and whether the cleaning schedule was adhered to. This seems to back up comments already noted elsewhere by Inspectors.

Carole Burchett
14 April 2008

8. Cleaning Contract Review

There are four contractors who use different systems to show they have completed cleaning in each location (general needs and sheltered).

In the contract for Aim High, they use a '*certificate of completion*' method. The idea of this is that certificates are signed for by residents – signing off the work to a satisfactory standard. These are then sent to SOHA where they are in turn used to progress the payments to the contractor.

The contractor, before the contract starts, works out a schedule of work which the completion certificates reflect plus a regular monitoring system.

The other contractors not using this method, I believe, post a notice on communal notice boards/areas indicating completion.

In an ideal, resource-rich world – these would be regularly compared against the schedule of work laid down and regular meetings with the contractors used to assess quality and performance. Residents would always be on hand to inspect and sign off the work – or challenge the cleaner if the cleaning was not satisfactory.

In the real world residents can feel intimidated – especially in Sheltered Schemes. In this case, the certificates are posted on notice boards – the manager of the scheme manages the relationship with the contractor in this respect.

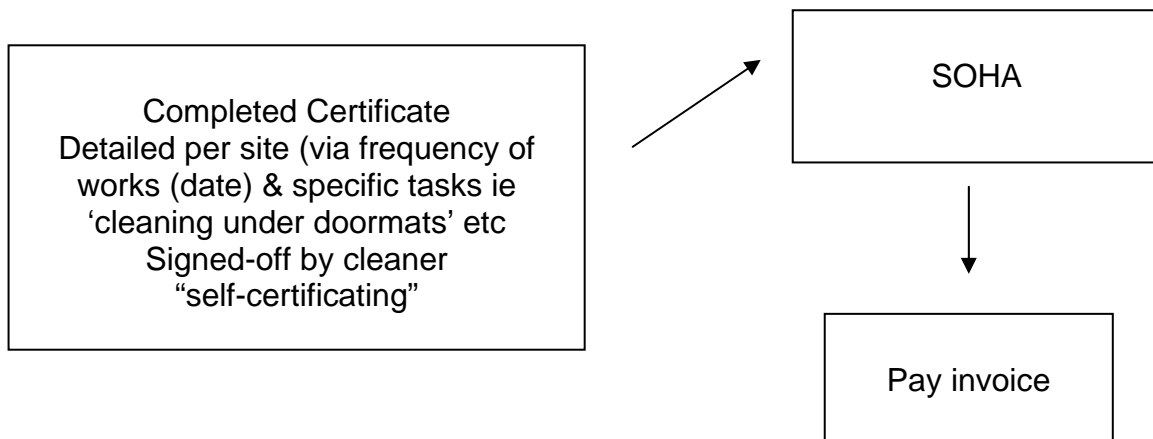
In General needs it is naturally impossible to guarantee a resident will be around to sign off the work and who feels comfortable challenging any unsatisfactory work. So general, undetailed certificates (date of work and confirmation of completion) are posted and in general, quality of work is assessed retrospectively through complaints and regular meetings with the contractors which are minuted.

The overall complaints are low and satisfaction seems to be good if you go on the statistics. This of course relies on those same general needs residents who are not around to sign-off work, feeling strongly enough about cleaning issues to make a

complaint. There is no way to measure complacency on both sides.

The letter of the contract and the methodology of monitoring outlined within it, is difficult to enforce due to lack of resources. If a method can be devised which cuts down the administrative burden, and one which places the onus on the contractor and their operative – it may improve the situation in general needs. For example – perhaps consider a system of ‘self-certification’ on more detailed completion notices where the emphasis is placed back onto the operative/contractor rather than the resident.

Example Suggestion:



- Copies of certificates retrospectively compared against complaints and spot checks.
- One spreadsheet – seven pages (per contractor) – scans of self certs embedded against Site/date details.
- Penalties greater for non-compliance/completion with more evidence available.
- Put emphasis on cleaner/contractor – remove resident from process as not realistically viable. Reduce administrative burden.
- This is merely a suggestion – obviously I don't know what the processes and IT bits and bobs are within Soha. This is just to get the ball rolling with suggestions.

Katie Robertson
April 2008

Communal Areas Cleaning Contract Review

Specification and Contract Terms

Main Contract tendering was in accordance with the principles of the “Code of Procedure for Single Stage Selective Tendering” 1996. Contracts were awarded to BCB and Aim High to clean communal areas in general needs flats, supported housing and sheltered housing in two separate areas. A further contract was awarded to Kings Cleaning Services for Window cleaning only, in these two areas. Clean Genie was awarded a contract to cover all aspects of cleaning communal areas in third area. The contracts were awarded to these companies as they met the criteria required for staff qualifications, training and qualification and awareness of health and safety and diversity. The service they offered represented good value for money.

The contracts clearly set out the scope and frequency of works, although some updating is required, where interim verbal changes have been agreed since contracts originally signed, when renewals are made. The estates manager has identified these changes and brought them to our notice and gives an assurance that the updates will be made.

All contracts commenced in April 2006 for a period of two years with an option to renew annually for a further 3 years, with agreed inflationary uplift, if both parties agree.

Fortnightly frequency covers litter picking, sweeping and mopping floors, dusting window sills, shelves and other such items. Removal of cobwebs, sweeping, washing and disinfecting all refuse storage areas.

Monthly frequency requires wood fixtures and fittings to be polished and the washing of paintwork in all communal areas.

Windows will be cleaned on a 6 weekly basis, in general needs blocks communal areas only both internally and externally. In sheltered schemes Communal area windows will be cleaned internally and external window cleaning will also include bungalows.

Annual frequency covers shampooing of Soha carpeted areas, stripping, buffing and re-sealing of vinyl (or similar) floors. This is to be carried out more frequently at specific 'heavy wear' locations as specified by Soha, and at pre-determined additional cost.

In-depth cleaning of kitchens and laundry appliances is done on an ad hoc basis when requested by a scheme manager, the cost is agreed with the contractor and met as an extra to the contract. Cleaning and maintenance of light fittings is specifically excluded from the contract, as this is beyond the remit of routine communal area cleaning. It is part of a periodic maintenance/bulb replacement operation and is undertaken either by Responsive Repairs contractors or Soha's in house caretakers.

Conclusions

To the best of our knowledge the contracts cover the recognised standard conditions of contract and statutory obligations. They do not specify overseeing quality of work, or spot checks for verification. Nor do they specify the allocation for the cleaning of light fixtures or reporting of defects for repair or replacement. There is no contractual provision for overseeing the quality of work. Housing Officers include cleaning checks in their routine estate inspection visits. Quality is also monitored by tenants who wish to ensure they get value for their service charge.

Recommendations

1. Soha should post information on the frequency of maintenance/cleaning checks for light fixtures.
2. Provide standard Soha forms to cover;
 - The dated completion of cleaning for posting on the communal notice board
 - Investigate a security frame for appropriate notices to be protected from vandalism
 - Requests for Housing Officer visits
 - Feed back from Housing Officers from routine estate inspections
 - Notification of repairs required, that have developed since previous visit
 - In conjunction with Housing Officers, instigate a manageable timetable of quality of work spot checks

3. Consider amending the requirement for a resident's signature on the completion of work certificate. This is frequently impossible in the general needs accommodation.

9. Conclusions

Using the information from the desk top review, on site checks, interviews with contractors, tenants and staff, we returned to our original questions.

In general Soha is getting value for money in maintaining the cleanliness of communal areas.

The contractors' specifications are adequate; they are fulfilling their contract to the best of their ability and represent value for money.

Tenants know what to expect from the service as this is prominently displayed in communal areas and is also sent out with the annual notification of service charges. It is worth noting that some properties refuse to have a communal notice board.

Soha have carried out a survey to see if the tenants are satisfied with the service they receive however the results are not conclusive. Soha is also able to check on the quality of the service from feedback from scheme managers and housing officer reports however there are not enough human resources to enable spot checks to be carried out. The majority of tenants consulted during this inspection were generally satisfied with the service they receive.

10. Estates Communal Cleaning Recommendations

	Recommendations	Soha's Response	Action by	Date
E1	That a way of recording the following is introduced to the main computing system:			
a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recording completion of cleaning certificates. 			
b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invoices passed to finance for payment. 			
c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Request for repairs to be made. 			
d	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reports of ASB in properties. 			
e	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requests for Housing Officer visits, with provision for feed back on any actions taken. 			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In conjunction with Housing Officers instigate and record a manageable timetable of "Quality of work" spot checks. 			
E2	Introduce standard, duplicated where necessary, forms for complete and post on communal notice boards when they have cleaned a property, duplicate to be sent to Soha. For reporting of repairs required and any breeches of tenancy such as obstructing communal areas or any other ASB.			
E3	Ensure that the following information is prominently displayed:			
a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule of dates when cleaners will be in buildings. 			
b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notices regarding Health and Safety issues concerning obstruction of communal areas. 			
c	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make clear, "in the event of accidents caused by this practice, they could be legally responsible for any compensation claims. 			
E4	Provide vandal proof frames for contractors forms to be displayed in.			

	Recommendations	Soha's Response	Action by	Date
E5	Introduce a procedure between departments to notify cleaners when other contractors may be working in a property at the same time as their scheduled visit.			
E6	Make contractual provision for electric light fittings in communal areas to be cleaned and technically inspected on a regular cyclic timetable, which should be posted on boards.			
E7	Consider appointing "Tenant Wardens" in each community development, who would liaise with housing Officers when ASB is observed, and report repairs on a more regular basis.			
E8	Individual security lock ups should be provided for tenants to rent for storage of prams, bicycles etc.			
E9	Provide covered bin stores for re-cycling material.			
E10	Amend the contract requirement for a resident's signature on contractors work completion certificate, this is almost impossible to obtain in general needs premises.			
E11	Increase Soha's Estate Caretakers as soon as possible.			

11. Acknowledgements

The inspection team would like to express their thanks to everyone involved with this inspection; Soha's tenants, contractors and all the members of staff. Without their contribution this report would not have been possible.

We would like to place on record our appreciation, of the courtesy given to us by all of the Scheme Managers of the sheltered establishments and to pay tribute to them, for the way in which they ensure, that their establishments are maintained in a clean and tidy state.

12. Appendices

Appendix i	KLOE 6
Appendix ii	Soha's Estate Maintenance and Communal Areas Policy PO29
Appendix iii	Reports on the visited establishments
Appendix iv	Concerns expressed by residents
Appendix v	Considerations for C Close and A Road Flats.
Appendix vi	Observations beyond the scope of contract cleaning

Appendix I KLOE 6

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has estates which are clean, tidy and attractive. Abandoned vehicles, graffiti and vandalism are dealt with swiftly according to set, well-publicised procedures. • Has and enforces clear policies and advice regarding the siting and installation of satellite dishes, aerials, sheds and other externally located amenities. • Systematically inspects all estates working with local residents and relevant partners to identify illegal parking, abandoned vehicles and issues of footpath cleaning and grounds maintenance, condition of communal facilities (particularly play equipment) and graffiti. • Deals quickly and efficiently with the issues identified in inspections, proactively tackling issues arising from private sector properties and adjacent land in the neighbourhood. • Links estate inspections with work to identify ASB 'hot-spots' (for example, community-led audits) and works with partners to address causes as well as symptoms. • Takes steps to identify those responsible for unauthorised dumping and other environmental damage, and takes appropriate action under its tenancy management or other, legal, procedures with or through partner agencies as necessary. • Can demonstrate that it is taking effective action, for example using innovative recycling schemes, to enable all residents to recycle waste. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintains estates in a reasonable condition, but with visible evidence of some neglect and poor management in some areas. Abandoned vehicles, graffiti and vandalism are dealt with, but not consistently and effectively. • Has clear policies and advice regarding the siting and installation of satellite dishes, aerials, sheds and other externally located amenities, but is inconsistent in enforcing them. • Has some good systems in place to identify problems in communal areas. There is evidence of involvement with partners in estate inspections and systematically identifying and dealing with problems. • Inspects its play equipment on a regular basis, but may be slow to repair or make safe, increasing the risk of injury to users. • Has made little concerted attempt to tackle issues arising from private sector properties and adjacent land in the neighbourhood. • Links estate inspections with work to identify ASB 'hot-spots' but doesn't work systematically with partners to address causes as well as symptoms. • Deals with one-off cases well, but does not have a systematic approach to dealing with environmental problems on its estates. Responds reactively to environmental issues, rather than planning ahead to avoid them. • Has ensured, with partners, that recycling facilities are widely available to all residents. • Deals with some aspects of the service well but not others (for example, it may remedy the problem quickly, but not identify and resolve/deter the cause of the problem). • Deals with parking and traffic management problems on its estates but does not take a systematic approach, and therefore does not make the best use of available space. • Has examples of positive practice, but cannot demonstrate a systematic, proactive approach to 'designing' out crime and improving security for residents. • Shows evidence of some preventative initiatives working jointly with local communities and other organisations.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensures that animals do not cause environmental damage or nuisance on its estates, and works well with dog warden and animal welfare organisations to remove stray animals.• Ensures that residents are informed how they can easily report infestations and has efficient arrangements for their eradication.• Ensures the most efficient use of its garages and parking areas, taking into account the needs of its services users, tenants and leaseholders, and other stakeholders, and design limitations.• Takes a proactive approach to increasing security and 'designing out' crime to communal areas and can demonstrate clear benefits for service users.	
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Appendix ii

1-Feb-08 1 H:POLICIES\P029

SOHA \ P029

Soha Housing Ltd

POLICY ON COMMUNAL AREAS

1. Objective

The Association will effectively manage areas that are outside the responsibility of tenants but which are owned by the Association.

2. Policy Statement

The Association will ensure that common areas are maintained to an acceptable standard. These are treated individually and include:

- Common parts to sheltered schemes
- Common parts to general needs flats
- Grounds Maintenance
- Hard landscaping

3. Implementation

3.1 Common parts to sheltered schemes

It is the responsibility of the Scheme Manager to ensure that the internal and external common areas are maintained to a good standard.

Communal Cleaning

The communal areas are cleaned at least once a week. Some schemes are cleaned 2 or 3 times a week. The Scheme Manager ensures that the lounge, kitchen, laundry, guestroom, halls, stairs and communal toilets are cleaned to a good standard at all times.

Window Cleaning

The outside of all flat windows and the inside of windows in communal areas are cleaned once every two months. The windows, frames and sills are cleaned and wiped down each time.

Gardening

Grassed and shrub areas on sheltered schemes are maintained regularly. The functions carried out under the grounds maintenance contract include grass cutting, leaf and rubbish removal, shrub maintenance and replacement, tree and hedge pruning. The Grounds Deleted: 8-Feb-07

1-Feb-08 2 H:POLICIES\P029

Maintenance contract sets out the standards and frequencies expected of both consultants and contractors.

3.2 Common parts to general needs flats

Grassed and shrub areas on common parts to general needs flats are maintained regularly. The functions carried out under the grounds maintenance contract include grass cutting, leaf and rubbish removal, shrub maintenance and replacement, tree and hedge pruning. The Grounds Maintenance contract sets out the standards and frequencies expected of both consultants and contractors. In addition, Housing Officers are responsible for ensuring that common areas are free from larger items of rubbish.

Soha's Mobile Caretaker arranges clearance where appropriate.

Where clearance is in a communal area, this cost will be recharged, within the service charge to all residents whose lease / tenancy permits

this.,

In addition, Soha intends to put into place contracts for the cleaning of communal stairs and hallways and communal windows.

3.3 Grounds maintenance

Grassed and shrub areas owned by the Association, and outside the boundaries of blocks of flats, are maintained regularly. The functions carried out under the Grounds Maintenance contract include grass cutting, leaf and rubbish removal, shrub maintenance and replacement, tree and hedge pruning. The Grounds Maintenance contract sets out the standards and frequencies expected of both consultants and contractors. In addition to the Grounds Maintenance contract, Housing Officers are responsible for ensuring that areas are free from larger items of rubbish, abandoned and illegally parked vehicles are removed promptly and dog fouling is reported to the relevant agency.

3.4 Hard landscaping

Hard landscaping areas owned by the Association will be maintained regularly. The functions carried out under the Grounds Maintenance contract include:

- Roads, footways, parking areas, garage forecourts, footpaths and drying areas are maintained in a weed- and litter-free- condition.
- Emptying and cleansing of road gulleys and litter bins.
- Supply and maintenance of salt bins with gritting, de-icing and snow clearance as required.

Deleted: 8-Feb-07

[1-Feb-08 3 H:POLICIES\P029](#)

In addition to the hard landscaping contract, Housing Officers are responsible for ensuring that areas are free from larger items of rubbish, abandoned and illegally parked vehicles are removed promptly and dog fouling is reported to the relevant agency.

Soha's Mobile Caretaker regularly patrols these areas to monitor condition and arrange appropriate clearance where necessary.

4. Priorities and Constraints

It is essential to the effectiveness of the policy that all areas are given equal priority. Where required, the Planned Maintenance programme should link closely with estates improvement projects.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Asset Management Strategy and the Environmental Policy

5. Responsibility

The Director of Customer of Services is responsible for the effective implementation of this policy.

The Director of Customer Services is also responsible for ensuring that all staff involved in this policy are adequately trained in the Association's procedures.

The Director of Customer Services is responsible for ensuring that works carried out to common parts take account of relevant Health & Safety legislation and that regular COSHH (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health) analyses are carried out.

6. Consultation

Consultation with local residents will be carried out before any changes to the management or design of communal areas are implemented.

Soha intends to promote the recruitment of a network of Resident Estate Watchers who can provide day- to-day estate monitoring and feedback to enable a faster response to a range of management problems.

Where appropriate, joint staff / REW estate inspections are arranged to identify issues needing attention.

Before major changes to this policy are considered, consultation will be undertaken with the tenants forum, the Supported Housing sub-group and, where appropriate, any other relevant residents group.

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7. Quality monitoring

Quality monitoring will be conducted by on site staff (Scheme Managers, caretakers), Housing Officers, Rent Collectors and consultants employed by the Association to monitor the above contracts. The Association will take action, where appropriate, should complaints be received.

8 Date of Board Approval

This policy was approved by the Board on the 27 January 2004

9. Date of Next Scheduled Review

This policy will be reviewed no later than December 2008

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Appendix iii

Reports on the visited establishments

Establishment A.

The establishment had been last cleaned two days prior to our visit

The standard of cleanliness was high and everything was in a tidy state, with exception of the mat at the entrance to the premises, which was badly stained. It is recommended, that the mat be turned or replaced if the staining cannot be removed. This would create an improved impression on entering the premises.

A community area is available which is not directly administered by Soha.

Establishment B.

The establishment had been cleaned two days prior to our visit and the standard of cleanliness was high.

The shrubbery across the entrance to this block, had been down trodden by tenants and others, taking a short cut to and from the entrance to Block B.

Establishment C.

The establishment had been cleaned the day before our visit and the condition in all internal parts was of a high standard.

The entrance area and paths, were badly in need of sweeping, although these were not necessarily part of the cleaning contract.

Establishment D.

Although work was being carried out to remedy damage done to parts of the internal communal areas on this estate including a replacement type of flooring. It was obvious that with some of the existing tenants in occupation that this action would unlikely to be lasting.

The neglectful action by a number of tenants must be upsetting for those more caring tenants and the problems of keeping these areas clean must be a daunting task for the contractors.

Personal belongings were left outside some of the flats impeding the work of the contractor's cleaners. In one communal area the stairway balustrade was being used as a bicycle rack.

Needless to say the cleanliness and tidiness of almost all of the communal areas on this estate were well below standard in spite of the efforts made by the contractors.

Establishment E.

The communal areas to these flats can only be described as unclean-able and were being left in a disgusting state by some of the occupants. It could not be seen how a cleaning contractor could overcome to its satisfaction to maintain these areas in a clean and tidy state. Personal belongings were left outside of some of the flats impeding the work of the cleaners.

There was a variety of discontinued wiring and meters on the walls of these areas which might even cause a fire risk and should be removed.

Establishment F.

The cleanliness of the communal areas was of a high standard and tidy appearance.

There was obviously a concern for the security of the establishment by resident after discovering a cleaner at work in a communal area at 11 p.m. one evening. Due to this occurrence we were informed by the residents that they would like see some way of ensuring that they receive prior notice of anyone entering the premises to carry out a service. Their Scheme Manager is not always informed of such visits being undertaken.

The residents would like to see an increase in the frequency of cleaning visits.

Establishment G.

The cleanliness of the communal areas was of a high standard and tidy appearance giving a real homely impression.

The residents expressed a wish for more frequent cleaning visits.

Establishment H.

The establishment had been last cleaned a week prior to our visit and the standard of cleanliness was high.

We were informed by the residents that only one lady cleaner was responsible for the whole of the condition of the establishment including the windows. They were of the opinion that the cleaner was extremely hard working the amount of work entailed called for additional help.

The height of some of the upper windows was some sixteen feet from ground level.

Establishment I.

The floors were of a high standard but the windows were not.

Recycling refuse boxes were kept and filled in the laundry area due to no outside protection from the wind. This was a matter of concern.

The internal see through glass panels at the side of some internal doorways were not clean and some had remains of sellotape on them.

The residents were of the opinion that an extra cleaner was required.

A number of personal mats were left outside of some flats.

Establishment J.

The establishment had been cleaned on the same day as our visit before we arrived and was found to be to a high standard of cleanliness internally.

The condition of the outside lighting fittings was dirty and not maintained.

Stacking chairs were stored in one of the washrooms causing an obstruction.

A community area is available which is not directly administered by Soha.

Establishment K.

The communal areas were reasonably clean but a number of personal objects were left in these areas.

At No.1, a timber board had been nailed to the bottom of the door frame, protruding into the communal area.

Cobwebs were covering some of the electric installation.

Establishment L.

Although the communal areas were clean, there was no floor covering and green recycling boxes were left in the areas, even though a separate store cupboard was available to each flat.

There was no floor covering in these areas.

Establishment M.

The communal Areas were being cleaned during our visit.

Parts of these areas were exposed to the outside, even though some double glazing had been fitted to these areas, which had no floor covering.

There were no mat well or mats fitted at the entrances of these blocks, each block had a ventilated skylight fitted in the roof, which could not be operated or cleaned. It appeared that these were badly in need of maintenance.

Some green boxes were left in the communal area but the refuse store provided was in a tidy state.

Appendix iv.

Concern Expressed by Residents.

1. There appeared to be some concern within the residents of sheltered accommodation in the Y area, that persons were entering the premises without prior notice and without their prior knowledge. At one establishment cleaners were found working out of normal working areas.

To alleviate this problem, consideration should be given to:-

A notice of forthcoming visits, should be given to the respective Scheme Manager and/or by entering the visit or next visit, on the establishments notice board.

All workmen or official visitors entering the premises should be wearing an identification badge.

2. There was a request by two of the sheltered establishments for more frequent cleaning visits.

Appendix v

Considerations for C. Close and A. Road Flats

In view of the condition that we found communal areas to be in on both the above establishments, which we consider to be a matter of serious concern, with many violations of the Tenancy Agreement. It is suggested that consideration should be given to the following:-

1. That all Board and Staff members who take pride in Soha's achievements should be made aware of the situation at these establishments and to be given an opportunity to visit the premises.
2. That individual security lockups should be made available for rent, by the tenants, for the storage of their bicycles.
3. That when allocations are made to re-occupy premises within these establishments, that consideration be given to appoint Tenant Wardens, to work towards enforcing the conditions of tenancy and to clean up the communal areas.

Consideration should also be given to the following in respect of other establishments visited.

4. Instructions should be given to all tenants living at these establishments that personal items should not be left in communal areas. It should also be pointed out to them that in the event of accidents caused by this practice that they would be legally responsible for any claims. (Section 4, Little Green Handbook)
5. Rather than to replace the gap in the shrubbery at the entrance to Establishment J, it is recommended, that this section be replaced by a disability ramp or steps, leading up to the entrance.
6. Having had the opportunity of seeing the facilities provided by the sheltered establishments, it is considered, that more could be done by way of illustrated literature to encourage more under occupying tenants, to move to these facilities,
7. Consideration should be given as part of a planned maintenance schedule, to ensure that all parts of the electrical

installations at all establishments are safe and clean. It appeared that the contract cleaners were understandably, wary of cleaning such items. Many cases of dirt and cobwebs and some damage were prevalent on these items through the inspection. (Section 7 & 10, The Little Green Handbook)

8. In some establishments adequate provision should be made for the storage of green boxes provided for recycling refuse.

9. The inspection and repair of the skylights at Establishment J

10. The fitting of floor covering at Establishment K.

Appendix vi,

Observations beyond the scope of contract cleaning

1. Matters drawn to our attention in communal areas, which were in no way connected with Contract Cleaning and should be referred to the appropriate department of Soha, were as follows:-
2. There was a need for planned maintenance programme either annual or bi-annual to cover the cleaning of lighting covers due to the entry of insects and to check the safety of fittings.
3. The taps in the washing room were badly in need of de-scaling at Establishment D.
4. An improved water supply was required to washing machines at Establishments E and F.
5. Replacement of missing fire extinguishers at Establishment C.
6. Moss fallen from the roofing, which could become slippery during wet weather, was prevalent at a number of establishments visited. Consideration should be given to the use of a chemical treatment during the dry season within a planned maintenance programme.
7. Establishment I does not have a dedicated laundry facility.
8. The worn mat in the kitchen at Establishment H presented a trip hazard.
9. An illustrated approach, to promote Soha's sheltered accommodation facilities to under-occupying tenants together with perhaps other incentives, is thought to be worthy of consideration.