

# Chair's Foreword

## FINAL REPORT OF THE COUNCIL FLAT CLEANING TASK AND FIINISH GROUP

This Task and Finish Group was established to look at the Council's arrangements currently in place to clean communal areas in blocks of Council flats. Through our work, we considered whether to recommend to the Executive Committee that those areas not included in the present contract for cleaning should be included in the next cleaning contract which is due to be implemented from 2010 onwards.

We feel that after many months of meeting with Officers and viewing for ourselves that we are now in a position to make recommendations regarding the extension of the cleaning contract and other ways to improve the communal areas which are contained within this report.

I would like to thank all of the Officers that took part in the Task and Finish Group review, especially our Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers, Helen Saunders, ably backed up by Jess Bayley. I would also like to thank the other three Members on the review, Councillors Anita Clayton, Brenda Quinney and Debbie Taylor. They have been a delight to chair and have worked extremely hard to come to a conclusion on this issue, also enjoying a few lighter moments on the way.

Councillor P Mould

**Chair of the Council Flat Communal Cleaning Task and Finish Group**

# Task and Finish Group Membership

## Task and Finish Group Members

Chair: Councillor P Mould  
Councillor D Taylor  
Councillor A Clayton  
Councillor B Quinney

## Overview and Scrutiny Support

Helen Saunders

## Officer Support

The Group would like to thank the following Officers for all their advice and support through the review:

Jess Bayley (Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer)  
Glenda Davis (Housing Options Team Leader)  
Carol Cockette (Older Persons & Special Needs Housing Team Leader)  
Clare Flanagan (Legal Services Manager)  
Chris Hemming (Asset Maintenance Officer)  
Peter Hill (Community Safety Officer)  
Liz Tompkin (Head of Housing and Community Services)  
Liz Williams (Waste Collection Services Manager)

We would also like to thank all of the Council flat tenants and leaseholders who attended the consultation event and those who provided their comments to the Group on an individual basis.

# Contents

<b>Chair's Foreword</b>	
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>page 1</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>pages 2-3</b>
<b>Introduction and Aims and Objectives</b>	<b>pages 4-5</b>
<b>Background</b>	<b>page 6-7</b>
<b>Methods</b>	<b>pages 8-13</b>
<b>Key Issues</b>	<b>pages 14-15</b>
<b>Discussion</b>	<b>pages 16-25</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>page 26</b>
<b>Appendix One</b>	<b>page 27</b>
<b>Appendix Two</b>	<b>pages 28-29</b>
<b>Appendix Three</b>	<b>page 30-31</b>
<b>Appendix Four</b>	<b>page 32</b>

**THIS PAGE HAS BEEN LEFT BLANK INTENTIONALLY**

# Executive Summary

The Council Flat Communal Cleaning Task and Finish Group was established in September 2008. The review was prompted by the high number of complaints the Council had received from Council flat tenants and leaseholders regarding the poor state of cleanliness in the communal areas of some of the Council's flats. The principle aim of the scrutiny exercise was to review the cleansing arrangements for communal areas including both areas that are subject to contractual cleaning arrangements and areas not currently subject to contractual cleaning arrangements and look for any ways in which these could be improved.

Officers provided us with information regarding the current cleaning contract. Cleaning arrangements were only in place in a small number of council flat communal areas and the specification for cleaning each of these areas varied. Where no cleaning arrangements were in place, it was written into tenants contracts that they were expected to clean the areas themselves. As a way of looking at the condition of the communal areas, we went out and visited areas in Council flats that were both cleaned and not cleaned under the current contract. As is demonstrated in this report, the standard of cleanliness between the two was very different.

This visual evidence helped us form the main recommendation for this report. It was apparent when we visited communal areas that where tenants were expected to keep these areas clean this was not always being done. We felt that all Council flat tenants and leaseholders should benefit from a basic level of cleaning and all of the communal areas in Council Flats should be of a good standard of cleanliness and be able to maintain this standard.

Consultation with tenants and leaseholders showed that the majority who expressed a view felt that cleaning should be introduced. Most were also in favour of paying a small service charge to cover the cost of this. We have therefore recommended that cleaning be provided in all Council Flat communal areas and that tenants and leaseholders be asked to pay a small charge to cover this.

In addition, we also examined other elements that could contribute to the overall condition of the environment of the communal areas. As a consequence we have also made some recommendations regarding the implementation of: the professional cleaning of some floors; better lighting, a method to eliminate unpleasant odours; and graffiti removal in the communal areas.

# Recommendations

We would like to recommend that:

- 1a) all communal areas in Council flats, that are not currently cleaned as part of the Council's cleaning contract, be cleaned under the new cleaning contract, due to be renegotiated for 2010;
- 1b) cleaning in communal areas in Council Flats implemented through the new contract should be set at the basic level which is comparable to the current schedule of cleaning that is undertaken at Woodrow Centre (see Appendix 1);
- 1c) the Council undertake statutory consultation procedures with secure tenants and consultation with leaseholders to establish if support exists for the introduction of a service charge to cover new cleaning arrangements, and if so the Council implement cleaning arrangements and any associated service charge accordingly;
- 2) in order to ensure that the cleaning contract is adhered to by contractors, Officers implement a system of their choice to monitor the cleaning of the communal areas;
- 3) details of when cleaning is due to take place in each of the communal areas and the cleaning tasks to be undertaken should be made available to tenants and leaseholders;

# Recommendations

- 4) that a capital bid be submitted to enable the flooring at the Three Storey flats in Batchley be stripped, cleaned and sealed to bring it up to a suitable standard;
- 5) that lighting occupancy sensors be trialled in one block of the Three Storey Flats in Batchley to monitor the impact and benefit of this system to residents when entering and leaving the communal areas;
- 6) a trial use of wall mounted air fresheners be undertaken in one of the communal stairwells. If this trial is successful, these air fresheners be fitted to Council flat communal areas prone to unpleasant odours;
- 7) correct no smoking signs be installed in all communal areas where none are currently situated; and
- 8) use of the graffiti wipes by the cleaners be made a prerequisite in the Council's cleaning contract.

# Introduction

The Council Flat Communal Cleaning Task and Finish Group was established in September 2008. It was established in response to the fact that some Ward Members had received comments and complaints from council tenants regarding the poor state of cleanliness they were experiencing in the communal areas of their flats. It was decided by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the best method of addressing this problem would be to conduct an in-depth scrutiny review.

## **Aims and Objectives of the Review**

There were several aims and objectives of the exercise. These included:

- 1a) to review cleansing arrangements for communal areas, (including both units that are subject to contractual cleaning arrangements and units that are not currently subject to contractual cleaning arrangements);
- 1b) this would involve discussions with relevant Officers at the Council; and visiting a number of communal areas to observe current conditions;
- 2) to review the Council's contract for cleansing communal areas;
- 3) to determine what expectations residents have for the cleansing of communal areas;
- 3a) this will involve speaking with Council flat tenants; and



# Introduction

## **Aims and Objectives of the Review**

- 3b) speaking with leaseholders, who also make use of those communal areas;
- 4) to review best practice cleansing arrangements used by other local authorities (and whether these arrangements would be suitable for Redditch);
  - 4a) this may involve interviewing representatives of external local authorities;
- 5) to review the Council's arrangements for awarding the cleaning contract to the service provider;
- 6) to make recommendations that would establish uniformity in service delivery;
- 7) and ultimately to make recommendations that would make the communal areas cleaner in future years.

## **Timescales for the Review**

We recognised that we would need to complete this exercise in time for any relevant recommendations to influence the renegotiation of the Council's cleaning contract. The Council's cleaning contract is due to expire on the 30th June 2010. As Officers would realistically require a year's preparatory work for the renegotiation of the contract, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee decided that the Task and Finish Group should aim to conclude no later than June 2009.

# Background

## **Current Arrangements**

Historically, the arrangements for the cleaning of the communal areas in Council blocks of flats have not been consistent. Before July 2007, an external audit of the cleaning procedures across the Borough had been undertaken. This review recommended that the Council's arrangements for cleaning communal areas be amalgamated under one contract. The benefit of this arrangement was that the Council would only have to deal with one contractor. Super Clean were successful in winning this contract for three years from 2007 until 2010 from the Council.

The contract contains several different specifications of cleaning for a small number of the Council flats. It also contains arrangements for the cleaning of other Council owned buildings such as the Arrow Valley Countryside Centre, Kingsley Sports Centre, St Augustine's Sports Centre and Shopmobility. The Council flats covered by the contract include:

The Batchley Three Storey Flats;  
Auxerre House;  
St David's House;  
Evesham Mews;  
Winslow Close and Winyates Centre Flats; and  
Woodrow Centre Flats.

Also included in the contract are all Council owned and run sheltered accommodation. As mentioned above, the intensity and level of cleaning for each of these areas varies but the contract clearly sets these levels out. To reflect this differing level of cleaning, tenants in the flats listed above pay differing amounts in service charge. For example, where more regular cleaning takes place, tenants are charged more compared to tenants in flats whose communal areas are cleaned only once a week. The service charge is also greater for those tenants who also receive the services of a caretaker.

# Background

## **Current Arrangements**

In addition to the level of cleaning provided in each of the communal areas, the contract has a clause written in to it stipulating that an extra 20 hours, per year can be utilised for cleaning as and when required by the supervising officer. This extra cleaning would enable cleaners to be called out to communal areas in the case of unforeseen cleaning problems such as hazardous or dangerous spillages.

Council tenants and leaseholders who receive cleaning are charged a service charge each month, alongside their rent. Tenants that pay Housing Benefit are exempt from paying a service charge. There are, of course, cases where tenants have defaulted on payment of their rent and service charge. However, there are mechanisms in place for the Council to use to recover unpaid charges although they are not regularly used.

Communal areas in other Council flats are not covered by the cleaning contract. In order to ensure that these areas are kept in reasonable condition, it is written into tenants contract that they are expected to clean and keep these areas in good condition. This is, however, quite a difficult clause to enforce.

Leaseholders are expected to pay a service charge where appropriate and in some leases this has been written in to the lease.

# Methods

## **Tour of Council Flat Communal Areas**

In October 2008, to begin the review, we visited several sets of Council Flats with a view to inspecting each of the communal areas within them. The Group selected a number of Council Flats that were cleaned as part of the Council's cleaning arrangements. These included:

- Evesham Mews in the town centre;
- the Woodrow Centre flats; Bushley Close in Woodrow; and
- Stretton House as part of the Three Storey Flats in Batchley.

To contrast with this, communal areas from Council flats not covered as part of the Council's current cleaning arrangements were also visited. These included:

- Exhall Close in Church Hill;
- Fownhope Close in Winyates West; and
- Laurel Close in Southcrest.

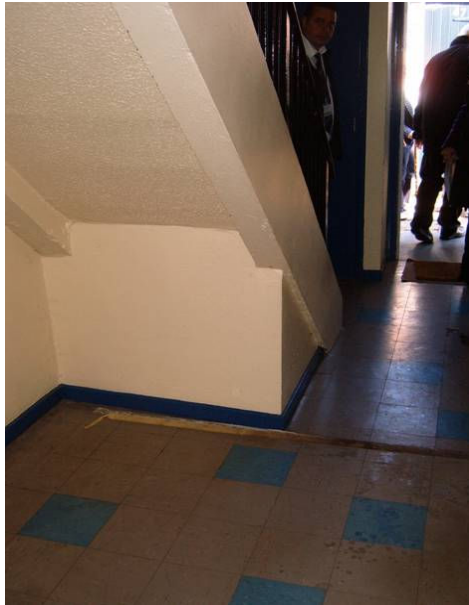
In addition, we also visited two of the sheltered schemes that were cleaned under the current cleaning arrangements. These included Chiltern House and Breedon House.

We were shocked at the high level of dirt, litter and fly tipping that we found within the communal areas of the flats that were not cleaned. Incidents of anti-social behaviour such as the setting fire to gas cupboards once they had been filled with left over newspapers had also occurred in these communal areas. Contrasting to this were the communal areas that were cleaned through the contract. These obviously looked cleaner and there was very little evidence of fly tipping and left items in the communal areas. However, there were still some issues of the free papers collecting in the communal area and not being removed.

# Methods

## Tour of Council Flat Communal Areas

While visiting these communal areas, photographs were taken to highlight some of the problems we found.



Photograph 1 – Dirty and littered floor in Fownhope Close



Photograph 2 – dirty stairs in Exhall Close

# Methods

## Tour of Council Flat Communal Areas

While visiting these communal areas, photographs were taken to highlight some of the problems.



Photograph 3 – Fly tipping in the communal space in Fownhope Close

Photograph 4 – newspapers accumulating in the gas cupboards at Bushley Close



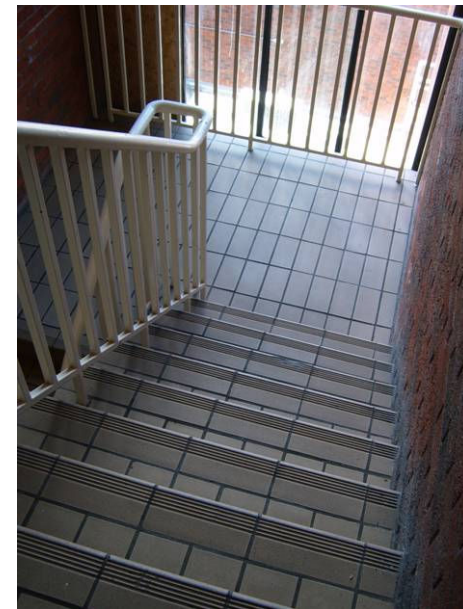
# Methods

## Tour of Council Flat Communal Areas

These are some of the communal areas which are cleaned as part of the current contract.



Photograph 5 – clean communal landing in Evesham Mews



Photograph 6 – Clean stairwell in Evesham Mews

# Methods

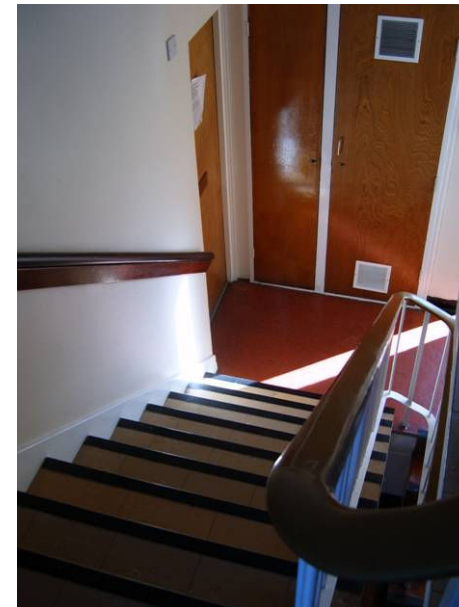
## Tour of Council Flat Communal Areas

While visiting these communal areas, photographs were taken to highlight some of the problems.



Photograph 7 – clean and tidy veranda at Woodrow Centre Flats

Photograph 8 – an example of the regularly cleaned communal area in the Chiltern House sheltered housing scheme





# Methods

## **Photographic Evidence**

Photographic evidence proved to be useful as it helped us in successive meetings to visualise the differing conditions of the communal areas that were cleaned and those that were not. They were also used to illustrate the difference in the standards of cleanliness to the Borough Tenants' Panel and to Council flat tenants and leaseholders during the consultation events.

## **Officer Interviews**

During several of the Group's meetings, Officers from Asset Maintenance, who administer the cleaning contract, and the Head of Housing and Community Services were in attendance at meetings. This was helpful for us to find out more information about the Council's cleaning contract, the selection, the process for selecting a company to undertake the contract, and the enforcement of the contract.

## **Consultation**

The Group felt that it was absolutely imperative that the views of Council tenants and leaseholders be sought for the review. We decided to consult with representatives of Council tenants by consulting with the Borough Tenants Panel. The Group attended a meeting of the Borough Tenants' Panel on Tuesday 27 January where they discussed the background to the review, showed photographs of the different communal areas they had visited during their tour and discussed some initial proposals of how to address the problems identified by the Group.

It was felt that it was particularly important for the Group to consult with leaseholders as this group of people were most likely to be affected if cleaning of the communal areas was recommended and a service charge needed to be introduced. The Group also concurred that all tenants in blocks of flats that were not cleaned should be given the opportunity to comment on the current arrangements for cleaning and ways to improve them. A consultation evening was arranged which was advertised by placing posters in all of the communal stairwells of the blocks of flats that were not included in the cleaning contract. Posters were also put in all of the One Stop Shops. The outcomes of the consultation event and the comments made by tenants and leaseholders that could not attend the event can be found in Appendix 2.

## Key Issues

### Issues Arising from the Visits

While visiting the selection of communal areas at Council flats and sheltered housing schemes, we identified several issues and problems with the current system. These are listed below in no particular order of importance:

**Disparity between communal areas that were cleaned and those that were not** – the difference in standards of cleanliness was immediately apparent. As the photographs in the previous section demonstrate, the floors on the communal areas that were not cleaned were very dirty and large amounts of rubbish left by residents had built up. The floors and general appearance of the flats that were cleaned were much tidier and cleaner. However, we noticed that the quality of some of the flooring in all communal areas was deteriorating and in many cases ideally needed replacing.

**Levels of fly-tipping** – the Group noticed that in the communal areas that were not cleaned, there was a large amount of household items left in places where they should not be such as in bin stores and on landings. Officers pointed out that the cleaners visiting the flats covered by the contract would be able to report any problems of fly-tipping back to Officers at the Council who could then make arrangements to get them removed. This did not take place at the communal areas that were not cleaned.

**Accumulation of post and newspapers** – a common problem we found between communal areas both cleaned and those not cleaned was that in most of the communal areas there had been an accumulation of newspapers and letters. These had been left and eventually tenants had pushed them out of the way of the doors into the gas cupboards or bin stores.

## Key Issues

### Issues Arising from the Visits

**Adherence to Tenancy Agreement** - Officers explained that in the communal areas where no cleaning arrangements were in place, tenants were expected through their tenancy agreement to undertake the cleaning themselves. It was clear from the visits that the amount of cleaning undertaken by residents varied considerably from each block of flats and on each floor. Some floors appeared to have not been cleaned at all whereas some floors were evidently being cleaned on a regular basis by tenants. Officers reported that it was planned for Tenancy Officers to have a more enforcement focussed role in the future that would enable them to be more pro-active in enforcing tenants to clean the communal areas.

**Adherence to the Cleaning Contract** – the Group questioned how the Council could check that the cleaning contract was being adhered to. Officers explained that in the sheltered schemes, the cleaners had to sign in and out with the wardens when visiting the premises. However, there were currently no ways of checking that the cleaners had visited each of the communal areas. Officers were keen to establish a system to enable them to undertake checks to ensure the contract was being adhered to.

**Lighting** – it was noted during the visit that some of the communal areas, in both those communal areas that were cleaned and those not cleaned, were quite dark and this detracted from the appearance of the areas. We were keen to see if additional lighting could be provided, in particular if it was possible to install motion sensor lighting so that when a person entered the communal area, the light would go on but then go off once no longer needed.

## Discussion

### Recommendations 1a, b and c

The following pages provide our rationale, discussion and evidence for proposal of these recommendations.

- 1a) **We recommend that all communal areas in Council flats, that are not currently cleaned as part of the Council's cleaning contract, be cleaned under the new cleaning contract, due to be renegotiated for 2010.**
- 1b) **cleaning in communal areas in Council Flats implemented through the new contract should be set at the basic level which is comparable to the current schedule of cleaning that is undertaken at Woodrow Centre (see Appendix 1);**
- 1c) **the Council undertake statutory consultation procedures with secure tenants and consultation with leaseholders to establish if support exists for the introduction of a service charge to cover new cleaning arrangements, and if so the Council implement cleaning arrangements and any associated service charge accordingly;**

We felt that the most important outcome of this Task and Finish Group review would be to try to recommend a way of bringing all of the communal areas in Council Flats to a good standard of cleanliness and to be able to maintain this standard. We felt that the best way to do this would be to extend the current cleaning contract so that cleaning could be provided in all of the communal areas. We would like to recommend that a level of cleaning be rolled out to all communal areas similar to that currently undertaken in the Woodrow Centre flats.

In order to pay for this cleaning a service charge would need to be levied on all tenants and leaseholders. This service charge should ultimately be determined by Officers during the renegotiation of the new contract but we would like to suggest that the charge is comparable with the charges currently charged to tenants at the Woodrow Centre flats.

# Discussion

## Implications of Recommendations 1a, b and c

We accept that there are a number of implications for the Council that would need to be addressed if making this recommendation. We spent some time meeting with relevant Officers to address these issues. These issues are discussed in further detail below:

**Changing of Tenancy Agreements:** It was noted by the Group that by introducing cleaning in all of the communal areas, tenancy agreements would have to be changed to acknowledge that tenants would have to pay a service charge towards this cleaning. Officers had advised us that if the requirement to pay a service charge was not recorded in a tenancy agreement or in a lease then there would not be the written evidence required to support the Council if a case of non-payment was to be taken further by the Council.

**Non-Payment from Tenants:** Officers informed us that in cases where a service charge is currently applied, the Council did not always receive payment from tenants who were required to pay. It was highly likely that some residents would be unable to pay an additional service charge. We also acknowledged that the economic climate in which the Group was operating was causing difficulties for many people and so may impact on their ability to pay a service charge.

We do recognise that non-payment could be a problem. However, we have agreed that there is a moral case to be made for the need to ensure that the tenants who want to have clean communal areas are not deprived of that opportunity just because there is a risk that other tenants will default on their payments. All Members of the Group were in agreement that the benefits that could be accrued by extending the Council's cleaning contract to cover the cleaning of all communal areas outweighed this likely problem.

**Statutory Consultation:** Officers advised us that if our recommendation was approved by the Executive Committee and Council, the first task for Officers would be to organise for statutory consultation with tenants to take place. This consultation would be required as the Council would be proposing to alter the tenancy agreements.

# Discussion

## Implications of Recommendations 1a, b, and c

The Council would need to comply with set guidance when carrying out this consultation, as set out in housing legislation, and would need to demonstrate that it was meeting a set criteria. This consultation would need to incorporate a combination of both sending written letters through to all affected secure tenants and hosting further consultation events.

Officers confirmed that the consultation process could be completed relatively quickly. Usually a period of 28 days consultation applied when making changes to tenancy conditions. Consequently, the consultation could be completed in time to inform renegotiation of the Council's cleaning contract. The results of this consultation will ultimately decide whether or not the Council is able to implement new cleaning arrangements in communal areas not currently covered by the contract and levy a service charge for this new service.

**Leaseholders:** We accept that introducing a service charge to Leaseholders may be more difficult. Officers informed us that we do not have a standard template for leases and that some leases might have the requirement for a tenant to pay a service charge already built into their lease. However, it is a possibility that many other leases would not have this requirement. Terms and conditions of leases would therefore need to be assessed on a case by case basis. The Council has no legal power to change the terms of a lease retrospectively.

We would suggest, to address the problems involved with extending the service charge to all leaseholders, that where no existing basis for charging is contained within a lease, the Council targets consultation to these leaseholders.

This targeted approach to consultation would enable Members and Officers to attempt to persuade leaseholders of the benefits involved in paying a service charge, even in cases where they were not obliged to do so by the terms contained within their lease. Many leaseholders might be persuaded of the value of paying the service charge because as owners of a property it would be in their interests to have clean communal areas, particularly when they were in the process of attempting to sell their properties.

## Discussion

### **Recommendation 2**

**We recommend that in order to ensure that the cleaning contract is adhered to by contractors, Officers implement a system of their choice to monitor the cleaning of the communal areas.**

During our investigations, it became apparent that one difficulty with arrangements for the current cleaning service was that it was difficult for Officers to know exactly whether the cleaning had been completed to the correct standards in each of the serviced areas. This was particularly problematic when Officers were dealing with complaints from tenants who were paying for cleaning in their communal areas but had seen no evidence of cleaners attending to do so. This issue was also mentioned by members of the Borough Tenants Panel, who felt that the system for delivering and monitoring the current contract needed to be improved before the contract was extended to cover anywhere else.

We agree with this and have decided that in order to ensure that cleaning is being completed in all communal areas that a monitoring system should be implemented. At first we discussed the use of a simple paper system, whereby a check sheet would be kept at each of the communal areas would be ticked once the cleaning had been completed for the week. The benefit of this system was that tenants were able to see when the cleaners had visited. However, it had the very obvious disadvantage of these sheets being easily removed or defaced. Officers have informed the Task and Finish Group that they are intending to source a more sophisticated system than this, such as one using Global Positioning System technology, and are hoping to implement this in time for the commencement of the new cleaning contract.

## Discussion

### **Recommendation 3**

**We recommend that details of when cleaning is due to take place in each of the communal areas and what cleaning tasks would be undertaken should be made readily available to tenants and leaseholders.**

Tenants' awareness of the cleaning contract was considered to be important especially in helping to manage tenants expectations of the level and frequency of the cleaning they are to receive. We all agreed that it would be helpful if once the cleaning contract for 2010 is agreed, that the cleaning specification, detailing the frequency, and the types of cleaning that will be undertaken in each of the communal areas in the different flats was widely publicised. This could be in the form of information packs given out with rent statements to publishing information on the Council's web pages.

### **Recommendation 4**

**We recommend that a capital bid be submitted to enable the flooring at the Three Storey flats in Batchley be stripped, cleaned and sealed to bring it up to a suitable standard.**

When we visited selected communal areas at the beginning of this investigation, we found that some of the communal areas were let down by the actual standard and quality of the flooring. We found that in some of the communal areas the flooring looked tired, worn and generally dirty. This dirt appeared to be ingrained into the floor and had been exacerbated by the dimpled design of the flooring which contributed to the overall poor appearance of the communal areas. We felt this was particularly the case at the communal areas at the Batchley Three Storey flats. We felt that this was an issue that could be addressed by this review. We queried Officers what cleaning regime these floors were subjected to. The cleaners, through the contract, were only obliged to mop the floors but not buff them. Consequently, the floors over time had lost their sheen and had become dirtier in their appearance.



## Discussion

Officers advised that the best method of remedying this situation would be to strip the flooring, clean and then reseal it. Officers have advised that to undertake this for one block of the Three Storey Flats it would cost approximately £191. Therefore to undertake this task for the complete 15 blocks that make up the Three Storey flats would cost approximately **£2865** in total. We would like to recommend that a capital bid be made for this work to be undertaken.

### Recommendation 5

**We recommend that lighting occupancy sensors be trialled in one block of the Three Storey Flats in Batchley to monitor the impact and benefit of this system to residents when entering and leaving the communal areas;**

As mentioned in the section detailing our findings on the tour of communal areas, we found that the lighting in some of these areas was very poor. We felt that it contributed to the poor look of these areas, making them dark and dingy and difficult to see in. This created an unwelcoming, potentially unsafe atmosphere. We therefore felt that something should be done to improve lighting in some of the communal areas. Officers advised us that it would be possible to install better lighting and also to move towards a more energy saving method of lighting these areas by using lighting occupancy sensors which would trigger lights to come on only when a person passes through the communal areas. We have suggested that money be found from the current budgets to trial this lighting in one block of the Three Storey flats with a view to rolling this out to other communal areas in the future. A detailed breakdown of the costs for this recommendation can be found in Appendix 3.

## Discussion

### Recommendation 6

**We recommend that a trial use of wall mounted air fresheners be undertaken in one of the communal stairwells. If this trial is successful, these air fresheners be fitted to Communal areas prone to unpleasant odours.**

As part of our investigations we also invited Peter Hill, one of the Community Safety Officers to talk to us about his ideas for improving the general atmosphere of the communal areas, as through his role he had worked on a number of projects involving the Council flat communal areas. During our visits to communal areas, we had noticed that some of the air quality in these areas was poor. Peter concurred with our views on this and suggested several solutions to this. He explained that there were several air freshener products that could be used. Simple air freshener sprays could be purchased as and when needed. However, this would not be an ideal solution as the container would have to be disposed of when the contents had been exhausted.

An alternative option would be to purchase a pump action spray. The spray apparatus for this option could be purchased at a cost of approximately £4.00 and could be retained for ongoing use, thereby reducing the amount of waste. Only the liquid used to provide the scent in the air freshener would need to be purchased on a rolling basis for the pump action spray. The costs involved in purchasing this liquid would be negligible. Pump action sprays would need to be sprayed by the cleaners when undertaking cleaning on a weekly or fortnightly basis (as stipulated in the contract).

Another alternative could be to install battery operated wall mounted air fresheners. Several companies produce these but an example product that we considered was the "Airoma Automatic Fragrance Dispensers". These can be purchased as part of a kit at a cost of £120.00. This price would cover the cost of vandal-proof casing for the spray and batteries. The Automated Fragrance Dispensers would last indefinitely. However, the spray canisters would have to be replaced as and when they run out. Twelve canisters can be bought for a price of £60.80 and these would last for six years, with canisters needing to be changed every six months. Eighteen sprays of air freshener would be released into the communal areas every day.

## Discussion

### **Recommendation 6**

The spray would be effective in an area of 200m<sup>3</sup>, essentially meaning that only one fitting would be required in a communal stairwell. An exact breakdown of the figures for the use of this product is contained within Appendix 4.

As a Group, we did have concerns about using air fresheners. We were concerned about the impact of these products on people with allergies. We were also concerned about the environmental implications of these products too. However, it was explained to us that the Council could use environmentally friendly products for all cleaning arrangements. Officially, the contents of the air fresheners were not liable to negatively impact on people who suffered with allergies.

As a Group, we felt that the Automatic Fragrance Dispensers would be particularly effective. It was explained that in terms of maintenance requirements the wall mounted fixture would need to be screw fitted. Members noted that this would add to the costs involved in providing this service as part of the cleaning arrangements, particularly if Automatic Fragrance Dispensers were installed in each of the 215 blocks of flats that could be covered by the cleaning contract. However, Peter suggested that these wall mounted air fresheners would not need to be installed in all blocks as some communal areas had adequate ventilation. Moreover, we recognised that it would not be appropriate to install the Automatic Fragrance Dispensers in all blocks as some communal areas may not be in need of them. However, this would be something that would have to be determined by Officers when implementing this recommendation.

Having being presented with this thorough information on this product we felt it would be appropriate to recommend that a trial use of the Automatic Fragrance Dispensers be undertaken in one of the communal stairwells.

## Discussion

### **Recommendation 7**

**We recommend that correct no smoking signs be installed in all communal areas where none are currently situated.**

One issue which was highlighted to us on our visit to communal areas was that of the tendency of people to use communal areas to smoke. This is now against the law and the Council is obliged to make this clear to tenants and visitors to Council flats. Officers informed us that No Smoking signs had been placed in communal areas when this legislation had come into force in July 2007. However, we found that these signs were not immediately obvious or had been removed in some instances. We would like to suggest that 'No Smoking' signs be installed in all communal areas where none are currently displayed. These signs should be positioned at some height in the stairwells to make it difficult for people to remove them. These signs should be able to withstand vandalism, however, we are happy for Officers to make a decision about what method they use to protect the signs and ensure they are able to withstand wear, tear and vandalism.

Officers suggested that to ensure that these signs stayed in place, an additional category could be added to the cleaners' assessment forms, used when undertaking their cleaning duties. This category would require the cleaners to indicate whether the 'No Smoking' signs were present in the communal areas. If the signs were not present this situation would then be highlighted and Officers could ensure that replacements were installed relatively quickly afterwards.

### **Recommendation 8**

**We recommend that the use of the graffiti wipes by the cleaners be made a prerequisite in the Council's cleaning contract.**

A persistent problem found in some of the communal areas in Council flats has been the prevalence of graffiti. Peter informed us that at present if the Council wanted to have graffiti removed they had to hire a contractor to remove the graffiti using specialist equipment and protective clothing. However, this was not a particularly cost effective solution.

## Discussion

**Recommendation 8** It was explained to us that there was an alternative that could be used by the Council which were the 'DE-Solv IT Graffiti Remover Wipes' which could be used to remove graffiti from non-porous surfaces but that would not be effective on porous surfaces or brickwork. As 95 per cent of the Council's walls in communal areas were painted, the graffiti wipes could be effectively applied to the walls in most communal areas to remove graffiti.

Peter informed us that the cost of each wipe was £00.08p. The wipes had to be bought in bulk purchases of 6 boxes at a cost of £12.50 per box. Each box contained 150 wipes. The use of the graffiti wipes would therefore be an inexpensive solution, and compared favourably against the costs involved in calling out contractors to remove graffiti.

We feel that these wipes demonstrated value for money and therefore the contract should be rewritten to require the contractor to use the graffiti wipes. The cleaners could remove the graffiti on a weekly or fortnightly basis, thereby preventing a build up in the level of graffiti in certain communal areas.

## Conclusion

This review has enabled us, as a Group of Members, to thoroughly investigate the problems of communal areas that have frequently been reported to us by Council flat tenants and leaseholders. We have been able to see for ourselves, through our visits to council flat communal areas, the staggering difference between those areas that are cleaned and those that are not cleaned as part of the current cleaning contract arrangements.

We believe that the current cleaning contract, as it stands, lacks consistency and favours a minority of communal areas and tenants who live in those particular blocks of flats that it covers. We feel that all Council flat tenants should be entitled to a clean environment when they enter their communal areas and that the Council should offer tenants the option of receiving this service.

We therefore hope that Members will approve our recommendation that all communal areas in Council flats are cleaned as part of the new cleaning contract. We believe that by implementing the recommendations contained within this report, the Council can dramatically improve Council flat tenants' living conditions both in the short term and for the future.

# Appendix 1

## **Current Cleaning Schedule for Woodrow**

### **EXCEPT FROM CURRENT CONTRACT: CLEANING SCHEDULE FOR WOODROW CENTRE**

**NOTE:** For the cleaning above 2.44m (8'0"). The Contractor shall provide appropriate equipment to meet Health and Safety Regulations.

The cleaning materials, i.e.. rags, cloths brushes, mops etc. used for the cleaning of appliances in lavatory apartments must not be used for cleaning wash basins, sinks, drinking water taps and fountains or any appliances connected with a drinking water point or food preparation area.

#### **A: WEEKLY – WOODROW CENTRE**

- 1, Balconies to be swept and rubbish to be collected, including newspapers, packaging, drink cans etc to be removed to bin store.
2. Window frames to be wiped down as required.
3. Faulty or broken lighting or damage to any other fixtures to be reported via job sheet to Winyates office.

#### **B: WEEKLY – STAIRWELLS TO WOODROW NORTH AND SOUTH**

1. Sweep stairwells, remove debris as required, followed by wet mopping and drying off.
2. Apply anti bacterial treatment to hand rails and stairwells.
3. Spray application of disinfectant throughout.
4. Subject to overall condition, the stairwells will also be periodically jet washed with an application of an Industrial based degreasant to walls, stairs and hand rails to remove heavy soiling.
5. Hand finishing wiping down of handrails and ironwork and applying anti bacterial treatment as required.

## Appendix 2

### **Consultation Event**

The consultation event with leaseholders and Council tenants took place on Tuesday 14 April at 7pm in the Council Chamber at the Town Hall. Unfortunately the event was poorly attended with only six people present. All Members of the Task and Finish Group were present alongside Chris Hemming, the Asset Maintenance Officer and Helen Saunders, the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer.

We began by explaining the purpose of the exercise to residents and highlighted some of the problems that communal areas not subject to cleaning were experiencing with the use of the photographs taken during the tour. We then presented our main idea and potential recommendation of implementing a cleaning service across all of the communal areas for all Council flats while also levying a small service charge for this service. The general response to this was a positive one. Residents and leaseholder who attended felt that they were generally annoyed at the way other tenants poorly treated the communal areas and the fact that even though it was stipulated in tenants contracts that they should take responsibility for the cleaning of their communal areas, that this was often left to the same people time and time again.



## Appendix 2

### Consultation Event

Below are some comments received from council flat tenants and leaseholders who could not attend the event.

### Individual Responses

**Consultee One** had lived in Fownhope Close for 10 years and had always cleaned the ground floor communal area outside his flat. He felt that as long as his communal area was clean it did not matter to him about other communal areas. He was against implementing cleaning arrangements in the flats as he was quite happy to clean his area himself. He also felt that the Council would end up spending more money in the long run trying to recoup the communal service charge back from people who refused to pay.

**Consultee Two** had lived in Leysters Close for 4 years. For the first two years she used to clean the communal area herself, however, over the last two years she has developed sciatica and has been unable to continue cleaning the area. She feels worried about her health and safety in doing so, just in case she slips and falls. She explained that the rubbish area is very smelly particular of urine and animal faeces. There have also been major problems with people dumping rubbish within the gas / electricity cupboards which has blocked access to the meters. She has also had to contact Morrison's to pick up three trolleys that had been left in the communal areas in her building.

She would be very happy to pay an extra 2-3 pounds a week so that the communal areas could be cleaned. She feels that the state of the whole area is awful and the poor state of the communal areas makes her feel depressed with her living accommodation overall. She does not feel that she can invite people to visit as it looks so bad.

## Appendix 2

**Consultee Three** was 85 years old and had lived in Leysters Close flats for 25 years. She explained that only 3 people in her block undertake the cleaning of the communal areas on a regular basis. She acknowledges that notices have been placed within the communal areas explaining to residents that they must take responsibility for cleaning; however these have largely been ignored. As she is now very elderly she finds it difficult to do any cleaning. She believes that introducing a cleaning contract across all communal areas of the flats is a necessity in order to ensure that the areas are kept in a good condition. She is willing to pay a small weekly service charge so that cleaning arrangements can be out in place.

**Consultee Four** cleans the communal areas along with two other neighbours. She felt that the notices put up in the communal areas to highlight to tenants that it is their responsibility to clean the communal areas are largely ignored. This lady felt that it had now got to the point where the Council would have to implement cleaning arrangements and charge for this service, although she did not seem totally sure that this was the best solution to the problem. She was 'resigned to the fact' that the Council would have to begin charging for cleaning. She did, however, feel that if tenants were warned that a service charge would be introduced, they might start to do the cleaning themselves.

**Consultee Five** lives in Exhall Close and cleans the communal areas there on a regular basis. She explained that she is the only tenant in her block who cleans the communal areas and she finds it very disheartening when, after undertaking the cleaning, it soon becomes messy again due to the actions of other tenants.

## Appendix 3

### Cost of Lighting Occupancy Sensors

Figures are provided below concerning the potential benefits of installing lighting controls at the Batchley Three Storey flats. For the purposes of this report, Abberton house has been used as an example. The potential savings could be multiplied by 15 if the system was introduced across all fifteen blocks at the Three Storey Flats.

Currently Abberton house has 14 x 28 w light fittings on both stairwells. These lights are on 24/7 due to the dark nature of the stairwells. The electricity usage is 3433.9 kwh per annum, this equates to 1476.5 Kg of C02 emissions and an annual cost of £226.63 (this has been confirmed by the previous 5 years meter readings). If we were to install occupancy sensors in both stairwells it is thought the following savings could be achieved.

Figures are based on the lights being on for a maximum of 4hrs per day. The revised electricity consumption would be 572.3kwh per annum, this equates to 246 Kg of C02 emissions and an annual cost of £37.77. An electrical contractor estimate the cost of supplying and installing occupancy sensors to both stairwells at Abberton house at £590.00. With an annual saving of £188.86 the pay back period would be 3.12 years (this doesn't take into account savings in lamp life and maintenance costs). Potentially, install costs could be reduced if all of the blocks were to have the system installed.

Total savings across all 15 blocks would be £2832.90 pa. If this system proves to be satisfactory it could be introduced to many more communal stairways that have similar operational problems. The only problem envisaged is the reluctance of residents to open the external door or their flat door onto a dark stairwell, as will be the case momentarily before the sensor picks them up.

It is recommended that we trial the system on one block (1-6 & 7-12) to gauge tenants feedback.

## Appendix 4

### Cost of installing the Airmoa Automatic Fragrance Dispenser

<b>Unit cost</b>	<b>£46.00</b>
<b>Vandal resistant lockable casing</b>	<b>£39.50</b>

To operate the system for three years you need the following items:

<b>6 spray canisters</b>	<b>£30.40</b>
<b>Batteries</b>	<b>(supplied with the unit – replacement cost £5)</b>

Additional costs

#### **Installation cost**

**Replacement of empty spray can (every six months based on 18 sprays per day)**

Effective in an area 200m<sup>3</sup>

## Overview & Scrutiny

For additional copies of this report, or to find out more about Overview & Scrutiny at Redditch Borough Council please contact:

**Jess Bayley**, Overview & Scrutiny Support Officer  
jess.bayley@redditchbc.gov.uk 01527 64252 (3268)

or

**Helen Saunders**, Overview & Scrutiny Support Officer  
helen.saunders@redditchbc.gov.uk 01527 64252 (3267)

Overview & Scrutiny  
Member and Committee Services  
Redditch Borough Council  
Town Hall  
Walter Stranz Square  
Redditch  
B98 8AH