

COMMUNAL FACILITIES

Range of communal facilities provided by schemes

CATEGORY	Lounge	Laundry	Guest bedroom	Shower	Kitchen	Lift (inc. 2 planned)	Integral corridor
1.5 (x 11)	8(11)*	1	2	0	8	0	4
2 (x10)	10	10	9	8	10	5**	10
TOTAL	18	11	11	8	18	5	14
% (of 21)	85.71	52.38	52.38	38.10	85.71	23.8	66.67

The usage of many of these communal facilities is difficult to monitor as this would involve detailed surveillance of tenants, although in some areas actual usage can be monitored from receipts for usage.

Communal Lounges:

A 2004 Leisure Audit of six schemes showed that a total of 597 events were held in 6 of the scheme lounges in the year 2004. This is an average of 99.5 events per scheme annually and 8.3 events per month in each. However, there is considerable variation in usage, in that some schemes have regular activity, often as a result of time put in by warden staff or others, while others are used only sporadically.

The usage within schemes by their tenants is also a variable, with some participating regularly, while others have little or no interest in the community aspects of the lounge. There also appears to be conflict in some schemes between older residents who wish to see their lounges used traditionally, while others, particularly younger residents, may see the communal lounge as simply an extension of their personal space.

The communal lounge is valued by a significant number of residents, particularly their regular users. The position of non-users or limited-users is difficult to ascertain, since this may be a reflection of their health, their social ease, their personal compatibility with others, or the appropriateness of activities to their own interests.

Within the consultation, communal lounges came 12th in rank both within the total wish list choices and in the selection of top 5 choices. Combining the communal lounge and 'active and sociable group' choices however, would change these ranks to 2nd in terms of the total choices and 9th in terms of top five choices. This would indicate that society and friendship are important to people, but perhaps that not all communal lounges offer people what they want.

Laundry Usage:

The laundry facilities in the schemes were used 9,892 times in the year to 20th February 06, which equates to 900 times per scheme annually, raising revenue of (then) £10,319.00.

Where possible, it is desirable for people to have the laundry facility within their own flat, and this should be an objective in all improvement programmes. As time progresses, arrangements which depend on people having to traverse communal areas in order to do their laundry is likely to become less and less acceptable, and is likely to affect lettability.

Guest Bedroom Usage:

11 schemes have a guest bedroom facility. The charge for April 2005 to March 2006 was £9.00 per night. (This is rising to £9.30 in April 2006).

This facility, located in 11 schemes, was used a total of 92 times in the year to 20th February 2006, which equates to 13 times per scheme. The revenue then raised by this was £828.00. However one scheme showed particularly high usage, related to one individual, without which the average is closer to 10 times per scheme annually.

The low volume of usage means that the guest bedroom is an underused resource; where there are clearly better uses that could be made of the space, then these could be surrendered, with perhaps 3 or 4 being protected for cross-scheme usage.

Communal Shower Usage:

It is difficult to assess the usage of the communal shower facilities on schemes as this is free of charge, and most tenants use the shower out of warden hours and are therefore not observed entering or leaving the facility. Usage is certainly determined by the standard of that bathroom (all of which have been or are being converted to level access), the standard and usability of the individual flat bathrooms for the occupants, and the degree of comfort that someone feels about traversing communal areas for personal hygiene reasons. Estimates from scheme wardens put usage at 13 people each day in total, with a maximum of six persons in one scheme.

While bathroom improvements will hopefully render the communal shower largely redundant in the future, they are a valuable asset at the present time, and are a useful for when assisted bathing is required or as a reserve facility in case of difficulties in any one flat.

Communal Gardens

Even where individual tenants may not personally use the gardens, they are important for psychological reasons. In selections of all the scheme attributes the garden area came 8th among the 20 choices.

Change

Any scheme changes must acknowledge that these facilities are within a part of peoples' shared home, and must be done with their cooperation and approval. Certain scheme assessments have identified communal lounges which see little use, and are not an integral part of the scheme, and these might be targeted for greater community use or for conversion to alternative use.