



PRESS RELEASE

No. 509/2017

Date: 25th August 2017

Clearance of Communal Areas in Government Housing

Following the Grenfell fire, the Housing Department has continued with its policy of clearing all clutter from common areas in housing estate blocks. The Department is pleased to announce that it has completed this work in Constitution House and Referendum House in Glacis Estate. For obvious reasons, these two tower blocks were given the highest priority in this exercise.

All housing tenancies prohibit items from being placed in common areas. Historically, the removal of these items has posed a problem for the Department but, in light of the recent fire safety review of public housing and in conjunction with the Gibraltar Fire Service, the Department is taking a more robust approach.

Inspections of the blocks have revealed all sorts of articles in communal areas, including furniture, gates and even illegal structures. These create additional dangers: of particular concern is the way in which such clutter restricts access in or out by the emergency services in the event of fire or medical crisis. The Housing Department and the Housing Works Agency, in conjunction with Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service, are currently undertaking visits to all Government properties in order to establish all items that require to be removed because of their fire or evacuation risk.

In June 2017 the Housing Department wrote to every tenant advising them of the restrictive covenant in their tenancies and asking that all common areas be cleared as failure to do so would be a breach of their tenancy agreements and constitute risk. This was also highlighted in two Government press releases on the 15th and 27th June 2017 and, in addition, relevant notices have been placed in every block.

Tenants have now been provided with every opportunity to remove obstructions and offending items. The Housing Department will continue to inspect areas to ensure compliance, an exercise which will continue throughout all Government Estates. Any illegal material found in the common areas will be removed without further notice. The exercise will continue in Glacis Estate next week and will be continued in other estates thereafter.

Minister for Housing, the Hon Samantha Sacramento MP said, "Tenancy agreements do not permit any items in communal areas. We are taking advice from the Gibraltar Fire & Rescue Service and, in the event that any items constitute a fire hazard or an evacuation risk, these will be removed and disposed of. We cannot underestimate the danger that this can pose to life in the



event of an emergency such as a fire or even paramedics having to transport someone requiring urgent medical attention in a stretcher. We all have to be conscious of this and the real risks that can be posed as a result of obstructions and obstacles. This is wholly unacceptable and as a Government, we will not be party to such an unnecessary risk to life in the event of an emergency.'