

Housing Services factsheet

- fire safety in Sheltered Housing



Keeping safe in your home

There are many simple measures you can take to help prevent a fire in your home. The following advice can help to keep you and your visitors safe.

Give yourself time to escape

- Sheltered properties are fitted with smoke detectors which are linked to the Telecare Response Team. The Telecare team will immediately respond to a smoke detector activation and will raise an emergency call directly to the Fire Brigade in the case of a fire, or a suspected fire at a Sheltered Scheme.
- Havering and The London Fire Brigade recommend that sheltered residents test their smoke detector once weekly. This is done by pressing the button and speaking to the Telecare Response Team when they answer to tell them you are testing. If your smoke detector fails to call through to Telecare report this urgently to your Sheltered Scheme Officer who will arrange an urgent repair.
- Where sheltered residents are classified as vulnerable the Sheltered Scheme Officer will assist to test the smoke detector weekly during a welfare visit.
- Additional fire sensors are available for people with hearing or sight impairment, your Sheltered Scheme Officer will be able to advise you on options. The need for additional fire sensors will always be discussed during your Sheltered Support Reviews.
- London Fire Brigade will carry out a free Home Fire Safety Visit for Havering residents, please speak to your Sheltered Scheme Officer if this is of interest to you.
- Fire doors fitted to your home should not be removed, damaged or wedged open – they are designed to resist flames allowing time for you and your visitors to be rescued. If your internal fire doors have been altered in any way this should be discussed with your Sheltered Scheme Officer as a matter of urgency.
- Close internal doors at night to prevent fire from spreading.
- Please comply with the requirement to have gas appliances checked annually.
- It is important that you advise your Sheltered Scheme Officer whenever you have friends or family staying over. This information is vital to the London Fire Brigade in a fire emergency when everyone has to be accounted for.



Remember:

IF THERE IS A FIRE IN YOUR HOME

NEVER use a lift • Do not try to fight the fire yourself • Call 999 from any phone

To help us in a fire emergency, please consider the following:

How would you escape?

- **We have a stay put policy within Sheltered Housing.** This means that unless the fire is inside your own flat and you have to leave your flat for safety reasons, or you are in a communal area where the fire is situated and you need to leave for safety reasons, you are advised to remain inside your property and wait for support and advice from the London Fire Brigade.
- Have a think about how you, or your visitors, would escape if a fire broke out **inside your own flat.** It is easy to get confused if it is dark or smoky so it's important to know your route out of the building using the exit stairs and fire exit doors.

It helps to count the number of doors you need to go through or use familiar objects to guide you to help with your escape in the event of a fire in your personal flat.



- Practising the escape route from your flat from time to time is a good thing to do.
- Your Sheltered Scheme Officer will be completing a personal Fire Risk Assessment with all sheltered residents. If you have a disability and might need assistance to escape from your flat your Sheltered Scheme Officer will discuss this with you, individual concerns will then raised with the Fire Brigade and their advice followed.
- Your Sheltered Scheme Officer will confirm the locations of your scheme's evacuation/fire assembly points.

Sheltered Flats and Sheltered Bungalows

London Fire Brigade advice is:

If there is a fire or smoke inside your flat or bungalow and your escape route is clear:

- Get everyone out of your flat, close the door and walk as calmly as possible out of the building by the nearest fire exit
- Do not use the lift
- Call 999, give your address including the number of your flat and state which floor the fire is on

If there is a fire or smoke inside your flat or bungalow and your escape route is NOT clear:

- It may be safer to stay inside your flat or bungalow until the fire brigade arrives
- Close the door and use soft materials to block any gaps to stop the smoke
- Dial 999, give your address including the number of your flat and state which floor the fire is on
- Go to a window and call for help

If there is a fire inside a communal area of your sheltered scheme, and you are in the communal area where the fire is occurring and your escape route is clear:

- Leave the communal area, close the door, and walk as calmly as possible out of the building by the nearest fire exit
- Do not use the lift
- Call 999, give your address including the number of your flat and state which floor the fire is on

If there is a fire in ANOTHER part of the Sheltered Scheme but not inside your flat or bungalow:

- Purpose-built flats and bungalows are built to give you some protection from fire.
- Walls, floors and doors will hold back flames and smoke for a minimum of 30 to 60 minutes.
- If you are in your flat or bungalow you are usually safer staying there unless heat or smoke is affecting you.
- Stay put and call 999.
- Tell the fire brigade where you are and the best way to reach you.
- If you are within the communal areas of the building, leave and call 999.

Stay put advice



The following evacuation advice is from the London Fire Brigade

- If any of your smoke alarms go off, never assume it is a false alarm.
- Shout **'FIRE'** to alert others around you.
- Don't waste time investigating what's happened or rescuing valuables.
- Don't tackle fires yourself, many people are injured this way. Leave it to the professionals.
- Keep calm, closing doors behind you to slow down the spread of fire and smoke.
- Before you open a door check if it's warm with the back of your hand. If it is, don't open it, there may be a fire on the other side.
- If there's smoke, keep low where the air is clearer.
- Call 999 as soon as it is safe to do so – **999 calls are free.**
- Find a safe room inside your flat away from fire, ideally one with a window that opens and access to a phone.
- Close the door and put bedding or any soft materials around the bottom of the door to block the smoke, then open the window and shout **"HELP, FIRE"**.
- If you have a phone with you, call 999 and ask for the fire brigade.
- Be ready to describe where you are and the quickest way to reach you.
- If you have already left the building never go back inside once you are safely outside.

IF YOU HAVE A PHONE

- If you have a mobile phone but cannot make voice calls, you can contact the 999 emergency services by SMS text.
- You will only be able to use this service if you have registered with emergency SMS first. **Text 'register' to 999.**
- You will get a reply – then follow the instructions you are sent.

How safe are your appliances?

- In sheltered accommodation where you have an individual gas boiler, or gas appliances, a safety check will take place every year, this is a legal requirement.
- The Council has a legal obligation to make a Gas Safety check every 12 months to gas appliances in your home and failure to allow access can lead to legal action.
- Make sure you allow access to your home when your Gas Safety / Gas appliances check is due.
- Think about how old your gas and electrical appliances are and where they are positioned – if you are not sure all your appliances are safe discuss this with your Sheltered Scheme Officer who will be able to request the appliance is checked by experts.

Carbon monoxide

- Carbon Monoxide (CO) is a poisonous gas that has no smell or taste and can kill quickly.
- Sheltered residents with individual Gas Boilers and gas appliances receive an annual Gas Safety Check.
- As part of your individual Fire Risk Assessment your Sheltered Scheme Officer will discuss any need for additional sensors, including Carbon Monoxide Sensor.



Candles and cigarettes

- **NEVER** place candles on top of electrical appliances such as televisions.
- If you use candles ensure they are kept away from materials that might catch fire such as curtains or furniture and are kept out of reach of children and pets.
- Make sure all cigarettes and candles are completely put out before leaving a room, especially before going to bed.
- Empty ashtrays and dispose of contents carefully so you don't put smouldering items on top of paper in your waste bin.

Electrical sockets

- Check electrical sockets regularly – if there are burn marks or they get hot they should be checked by a registered electrician. If you have any concerns please raise with your Sheltered Scheme Officer.
- Don't overload sockets, especially with high powered items like kettles, irons or heaters.
If you need more sockets fitted please raise with your Sheltered Scheme Officer.
- Turn off and unplug all possible electrical equipment when it is not in use, including TVs, stereos, fans and kettles, especially before going to bed.



Electrical appliances

- Hairdryers, straighteners and curling tongs get very hot - ensure they have time to cool down before you leave your home.
- Ensure irons are switched off when not in use and do not leave unattended when switched on.
- Don't leave your phone or tablet charging over night as batteries can overheat and catch fire.
- While items are cooling off, ensure they are stored away from materials which can catch fire.
- Don't use electrical heaters near curtains or furnishings and **NEVER** dry clothes on them.
- Don't cover air vents on storage or fan heaters and ensure they are kept dust free.
- Don't trail cables under carpets or rugs.
- If you have bought second hand appliances have them checked by a qualified electrician before using them.



Before you go to bed

- Close all doors as this helps to prevent fire spreading.
- Switch off and unplug electrical items such as TVs and avoid charging devices like mobile phones when you sleep.
- Only leave essential appliances switched on such as the fridge or freezer, turn all others off.
- Make sure candles are out before you go to bed.
- Check your cooker and heaters are turned off.



Mirrors and glass

- Don't have crystal or glass objects on windowsills where they focus the sun's rays and set items alight.
- Don't put mirrors opposite windows as they can reflect the sun's rays onto curtains or soft furnishings and set them alight.

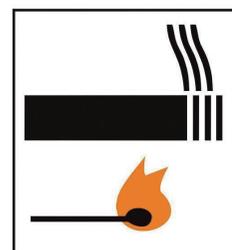
In the kitchen

- A heat alarm fitted in the kitchen will detect the increase in temperature caused by a fire but will not be set off by cooking fumes. The need for additional sensors will be discussed during the completion of your personal Fire Risk Assessment, in the meantime if you have any concerns about safety while cooking please raise with your Sheltered Scheme Officer.
- Don't cook if you are tired, have been drinking alcohol or taking medication that might make you drowsy.
- Have all appliances fitted by an appropriately qualified professional, i.e. gas appliances by Gas Safe Engineer.
- If you buy a new gas cooker ensure it is fitted with Flame Supervision Device – this makes sure the supply of fuel is cut off automatically and immediately if the flame goes out for any reason.
- Never leave cooking unattended – most fires start in kitchens.
- Avoid leaving children alone when cooking is going on.
- Always keep matches and saucepan handles out of reach.
- Never dry towels on or near a cooker.
- Don't let fat or grease build up, i.e. on a grill pan as it can easily catch light.
- Use chip pans safely – don't fill the pan more than one third full, dry chips before putting them into the oil to avoid spitting or boiling over and **NEVER** put chips in the pan if the oil has started smoking.
- If a chip pan catches fire carefully use a fire blanket or a damp towel (not one dripping water) to smother the flames and if safe turn off the cooker.
- Make sure you turn the cooker off when you've finished using it.
- Never allow cables to trail across a cooker.



In the living room

- When buying or replacing furniture (i.e. sofas and chairs) make sure they contain fire retardant foam rather than polyurethane foam.
- Don't leave appliances such as televisions or computers on standby, switch them off at the mains socket.



RESISTANT

In bedrooms

- Don't smoke or have candles in your bedroom – you may fall asleep without putting them out properly.
- Don't use or store any aerosols around any source of heat – they are highly flammable.

Electric Blankets

- If you use an electric blanket, have it tested by a registered electrician at least every three years, and consider changing it if it is more than 10 years old.
- if it has an old BEAB safety mark (a round symbol) rather than while capital letters on a black background the blanket is over 10 years old.
- Ensure the blanket is switched off before you get into bed.

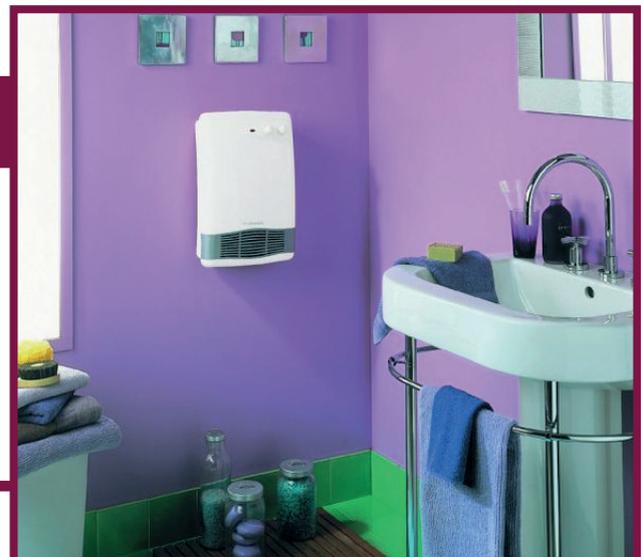
If your electric blanket shows any signs of wear, including fraying fabric, scorch marks, exposed elements, creasing or folding, soiling, damp patches, damaged or missing tie tapes, worn flex or loose connections – **DO NOT USE IT.**

- Never use a hot water bottle in a bed that has an electric blanket – **water and electricity don't mix.**
- If you have any concerns around the safety of your electric blanket please raise with your Sheltered Scheme Officer.



In the bathroom

- Keep portable electrical equipment such as hairdryers out of bathrooms – **water and electricity don't mix.**
- **NEVER** run extension cables into the bathroom



Medication

- Skin creams and paraffin based products, for example White Soft Paraffin (which may also contain 50% liquid Paraffin), emulsifying ointments, and product treated dressings are easily ignited by a naked flame or cigarette.
- These creams and ointments are easily transferred onto clothing and bedding which can then also become flammable if exposed to a naked flame or cigarette.
- Always take care when using these products.

• Oxygen Use/Storage in Your Home

Oxygen must be stored and used in accordance with safety guidelines and instructions. Oxygen must be kept away from naked flames, cigarettes and sources of direct heat as is highly flammable.

It is vital when oxygen is required for personal medical use at home your Sheltered Scheme Officer is made aware, and the use and storage of oxygen is included in your personal Fire Risk Assessment.

As part of our Risk Assessment process we highlight Oxygen users with the London Fire Brigade to ensure not only appropriate guidance, but importantly the necessary response in the event of a fire.

In communal areas

- Keep communal areas clear of clutter – no net curtains, carpets or rugs as these can spread fire.
- Don't leave rubbish bags outside your door or put plants or other items outside as this can block escape routes and will be removed by Council Staff.
- Make sure bikes, scooters, prams, buggies and children's toys are stored appropriately in your own flat, i.e. not in communal areas where they may be a trip hazard or cut off an escape route for you or other residents in the event of an emergency, or hinder the work of the fire service.
- Communal doors are fire check doors – ill-fitting or damaged doors may not fully protect you from the spread of smoke or fire.
- Fire doors have self-closing devices to close the doors automatically.
- **NEVER** prop open these doors as it can damage both the door and the closer.
- Report any damage to your Sheltered Scheme Officer.
- **NEVER** remove, tamper with or move any fire prevention equipment located throughout the communal areas of your Sheltered Scheme. Report any removals to your Sheltered Scheme Officer.
- Landings, stairwells and corridors form part of the escape route so rubbish or clutter left in these areas may block your route or provide fuel for a fire.



Getting rid of rubbish

- Put bags of rubbish either down chutes or into the external bins provided.
- Place rubbish into small bags when using bin chutes – if a chute becomes blocked report it to your Sheltered Scheme Officer during office hours, or report to Telecare via your pendant alarm out of working hours
- Bulky items – these can be removed by Havering Council – book your collection at www.havering.gov.uk/BulkyWaste.

Outside your building

- Do not store petroleum spirit (petrol, diesel or paraffin) or liquid propane gas cylinders in your home or in the communal areas as they can easily ignite.
- Don't park in a way that would block access to the building or cause a problem for emergency services personnel to enter.
- Don't allow people into your Sheltered Scheme if you don't know who they are.
- Do not smoke in communal areas, including stairways, landings, lifts, communal laundry rooms, communal lounges, communal balconies and pathways – it is illegal.



In the garden or on the balcony

- Remember you are not allowed to use a barbecue on your balcony or in a communal garden.
- If using a barbecue in your own bungalow garden, when you have finished cooking make sure it is extinguished and any charcoal is no longer hot.
- Even the small disposable barbecues have set decking alight when the coals have not been properly extinguished.
- Keep garden furniture, plants, plastic ornaments etc. well away from escape routes, pathways and balconies as they can easily ignite and cause fumes.
- Residents in sheltered flats and bungalows are not permitted to use garden waste incinerators. Havering operates a green waste collection service, please speak to your Sheltered Scheme Officer for details.

Mobility Scooters

- Mobility scooters must not be stored and charged in communal areas, communal corridors or individual flats. For scooter users your Sheltered Scheme Officer will personally discuss access to appropriate scooter storage and charging areas. This will be done as a part of your individual Fire Risk Assessment.



What the Council does:

As part of regular maintenance work we do daily, monthly and annual checks on our Sheltered Schemes to make sure that the appropriate fire prevention and safety measures are in place. Our checks include:

- Daily checks to identify and remove any items which could block a fire escape route (including bulk rubbish).
- Monthly checks to ensure that all communal doors are in full working order and that they are fitted with a smoke seal strip to provide a barrier against fire, smoke and hot gases.
- Annual checks on all smoke detection equipment.
- Fire Risk Assessments in every building, including Sheltered Schemes.
- Test Emergency Lighting.
- Annual Gas Safety checks – we will contact you to make an appointment for this to be carried out.

London Fire Brigade advice

The London Fire Brigade provides the following advice if a fire occurs in your home:

- There is a 'stay put' policy in place for Sheltered Schemes.
- Flats are built to give you some protection from fire.
- Walls, floors and doors will hold back flames and smoke for a while.
- Putting damp towels along the bottom of doors can help keep smoke out.
- If a fire occurs in your building, it is usually safe for you to stay in your home, unless it is affected by heat or smoke. (This ensures routes are clear for the Fire Brigade to access and tackle the fire.)
- If your flat or bungalow is **directly affected** by heat or smoke from a fire, leave immediately if it is safe to do so.
- If the fire is inside your flat or bungalow, alert everyone in your home.
- If possible close any doors to any rooms where the fire is burning.
- Do not stop to collect your belongings.
- Close your front door as you leave.
- Alert your direct neighbours if they are at risk, and it is safe to do so.
- Never take the lift where there is a fire in the building, if you have to leave your flat use the stairs and the nearest fire exit.
- Call 999 and ask for the Fire Brigade, tell them the address of the building, tell them it is Sheltered Housing, your flat number and, if known, which floor the fire is on.
- If you have left the building, do not re-enter the building unless you are told by the emergency services that it is safe to do so.

If you are trapped in your home:

- Close the door.
- Block any gaps around your door to block smoke.
- Keep your mobile phone with you if possible.
- Shout and / or wave a blanket or cloth from the window to get help.
- If there is a lot of smoke, if mobility allows get down as close to the floor as you can as the air will be clearer.
- Stay as far away from the fire as possible and where possible close all doors behind you to reduce the spread of the fire.



**In the event
of a fire do not
use this lift**