

Your guide to Estate Management Service Standards



Solihull
Community Housing
Shaping our neighbourhoods



Who are Solihull Community Housing (SCH)?

Solihull Community Housing (SCH) manages and maintains council homes and delivers housing services on behalf of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (SMBC). Although SCH provides day-to-day housing services, the Council remains the owner of the housing stock and is your landlord. The Council retains the responsibility for ensuring your home is managed in line with the Consumer Standards.

We manage just under 10,000 tenanted homes, 1,000+ leasehold properties, around 4,600 garages and a small number of shared ownership properties. We also manage 100 temporary accommodation units, supplemented by private sector leasing properties.

We are run by a Board made up of three tenants, three councillors and three independents chosen for their specialist skills and experience.

What are our Estate Services?

Estate services are generally activities targeted to manage the shared spaces in and around areas of housing. This includes high and low-rise flatted buildings.

- We inspect estates (including shared areas such as alleyways, gardens, and garage sites)
- Grounds maintenance (this includes grass mowing, hedge/shrub cutting, weeding and trees)
- Cleaning (internal communal floors/stairs, external paths and entrances)
- Respond to littering and fly-tipping reports
- Undertake small groundwork projects
- Report communal repairs identified on inspections
- Inspections relating to building safety, particularly in high-rise buildings, includes routine checks on accessibility and fire management controls.

SCH properties

Generally, SCH managed properties are likely to fall into the following categories:

- **High and low-rise buildings, and areas where the majority of properties are managed by SCH.** Estates Services are largely focused on these types of properties and often the costs are included in the calculation of the rent charged, and service charges for leaseholders.
- **Individual or small groups of properties** in areas of mixed tenure who benefit from services provided by SMBC as part of their responsibility for managing public space.

There is a partnership that operates between SCH and SMBC and this provides a mix of services that residents benefit from. Some are provided by SCH, some by SMBC and some responsibilities are shared.



There is regular interaction between the staff of SCH and SMBC over the management of the estates. On a monthly basis staff from SMBC and SCH invite local Councillors and residents on a walkabout around a designated location (usually reflecting an area where persistent issues have been identified) to share observations and suggestions about how best to improve the area and combine resources to resolve problems.

Regardless of who is responsible for a service, where issues are raised by the resident through the contact centre or with other SCH staff, the enquiry is directed to the correct team to take action.

Estate Services delivery

The table below is a guide on who is responsible for the delivery of various Estate Services in the Borough:

Activity	Responsible Organisation	Service Delivery
Cleaning		
Communal cleaning of low-rise buildings 		Contractors are appointed to do the work
Communal cleaning of high-rise buildings		Contractors are appointed to do the work
Communal window cleaning  		Contractors are appointed to do the work



Communal recycling bins		Contractors are appointed to do the work
Bin store areas in high-rise buildings  Messy  Tidy		Contractors and directly employed staff are used to manage the work
Rubbish		
Fly-tipping communal areas around buildings  Before  After		SCH directly employ staff and contractors to do the work
Litter picking in communal areas around buildings 	 	SCH directly employ staff to do the work as well as contractors appointed by SMBC
Fly tipping other areas  Before  After		Contractors are appointed to do the work



Litter picking within Solihull, highways and public areas		Contractors are appointed to do the work
Grounds Maintenance		
Grass cutting Before  After 		Contractors are appointed to do the work
Tree maintenance and safety Before  After 	 	Contractors are appointed to do the work
Professional advice on how best to manage trees		SMBC directly employ staff do the work
Hedge and shrub maintenance Before  After 		Contractors are appointed to do the work
Immediate issues relating to safe use of pathways	 	SCH directly employ staff do the work
Weed clearance		Contractors are appointed to do the work
Leaf clearance		Contractors are appointed to do the work



Alleyways Before After		Contractors are appointed to do the work
Immediate issues relating to safe use of pathways		SCH directly employ staff to do the work
Ivy growth removal Before After		SCH directly employ staff to do the work
Dog fouling		SCH directly employ staff do the work
Safety		
Fire safety checks 		SCH directly employ staff do the work
Key and Fob management in high-rise buildings		SCH directly employ staff to do the work



Maintaining evacuation routes  Not acceptable  Acceptable		SCH directly employ staff do the work
Abandoned vehicles  	 	Both SCH and SMBC directly employ staff to do the work
Wider Improvements		
Estate inspections Metal bin wheel replacement 		SCH directly employ staff to do the work



Notice boards in high-rise buildings 		SCH directly employ staff to do the work
Environmental improvements Before  After  Before  After 		Contractors are appointed to do the work



Cleaning

Communal cleaning of low-rise buildings and mews

The frequency of cleaning is two days per week in low-rise buildings and once per week in mews blocks; the days when the cleaner(s) are in attendance will be displayed in the building. SCH carry out a quality inspection every three months which is part of the formal contract management process. However, issues relating to the cleaning will be responded to as they arise.

Communal cleaning of high-rise buildings

The frequency of cleaning is Monday to Friday. This will involve cleaning three floors plus the ground floor every day as well as sweeping the stairs.

There is a separate requirement to unblock the bin chutes and clean up biohazards (body fluids, human tissue, and blood) and an expectation this is done within one hour of notification. SCH carry out a quality inspection every month which is part of the formal contract management process. However, issues relating to the cleaning will be responded to as they arise.

Communal window cleaning

External cleaning of the communal windows of high-rise buildings is undertaken annually. This will generally be scheduled during the Spring and Summer months.

Communal recycling bins

The responsibility for the collection and maintenance of the recycling bins lies with SMBC who manage this alongside the refuse collection service.

Bin store area

These areas are included in the regular inspections undertaken by the Estates Assistants and where issues need attention they are responded to. Additionally, the cleaning contractor is expected to support the upkeep of these areas to allow the refuse collection to operate without disruption.

Rubbish

Litter picking

The contractor responsible for maintaining the grass is contracted to litter pick prior to mowing. SCH staff will also carry out litter picking in and around the high-rise buildings, particularly in response to items thrown from windows.

Fly-tipping in communal areas around buildings

Where fly-tipping takes place in and around communal areas, SCH staff will remove this.



A judgement is made as to whether the items present a safety risk, if so, the items will be removed as soon as possible (usually the same day), while other items are usually removed within five working days.

Fly tipping in other areas (Council managed land)

SMBC has a responsibility for acting on reports of fly-tipping to remove the waste and to locate and prosecute the offenders. Where waste is hazardous the council has a responsibility to ensure public safety until such time as the waste can be removed.

If you have witnessed a fly tip taking place, please let SMBC know by calling 0121 704 8000. There is also a **Support Home Page** online where issues can be reported.

SMBC have a 20 week turnaround for removing fly-tipping on other SCH communal land, such as alleyways and amenity land.

Grounds Maintenance

Grass cutting

SMBC cut the grass on highway verges, and in our parks, open spaces, and communal gardens approximately every 12 working days between March and the end of October. However, this can change depending on the weather.

Hedge and shrub maintenance

Hedges and shrubs are cut annually between November and the end of March but this depends on the weather. Outside of the maintenance cycle SMBC will only cut back a hedge or shrub if it is causing an obstruction or affecting the visibility of the road (this does not include hedge height).

Where vegetation growth is limiting the use of a path to such an extent that creates a hazard forcing a pedestrian off the path action will be taken. Where a hedge or shrub is growing naturally and looks unmanaged but is not directly causing issues to access then this is unlikely to be responded to.

Trees

SCH has the responsibility for the management of trees on land it manages on behalf of SMBC. The SMBC Forestry Service will inspect a tree and provide advice and guidance to SCH about how trees should be managed and recommends works to maintain the health and safety of the tree.



We cannot carry out works on trees:

- to stop leaves falling on the ground. We do not prune or cut down council owned trees to prevent or to clear leaves from properties - this is a natural process in autumn and trimming trees will not prevent it
- to cut them back to increase light to a property. We do not prune or cut down council owned trees to improve natural light, including for solar panels
- to reduce the height of tall trees if they seem overgrown. This type of work could potentially damage the tree long term and cause further issues
- due to honeydew or sap; this is a natural substance that does not damage cars
- we do not prune for fallen fruit, berries, nuts, or seeds from council trees. We also have no policy to remove trees with poisonous fruit or foliage (such as yew trees), however where it is suspected to be a risk we will investigate
- due to birds nesting, roosting, or fouling. Nesting birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (and other related wildlife law)
- due to the TV signal being blocked. Trees only get pruned if overhead cables are taught. If you are affected by a poor signal, you should speak to your provider for help
- due to pollens and allergens



We will respond to trees that are:

- damaged and present a risk from falling branches
- growing in a way that branches are likely to touch a property
- damaging pathways to an extent, causing the surface to become uneven and a tripping risk
- take advice from SMBC tree officers and, where resources permit, follow recommendations received regarding the management of trees across SCH managed land

Weed clearance

As part of the grounds maintenance contract, SMBC weeds on communal land managed by SCH are sprayed three times a year. The timing of this will be subject to weather as the most effective treatment needs to be during a dry period.

Leaf clearance

Each year during late autumn and early winter, SMBC clear a large number of leaves that fall from trees. The main sweeping schedule takes place from November to January, but this can change due to the weather conditions.



The majority of leaves are cleared by SMBC's normal sweeping service, but some areas require extra leaf clearance due to a high number of trees.

Alleyways

In some areas there are alleyways behind and between rows of properties. The clearance of this is the responsibility of SMBC and there can be a number of reasons why access is not possible.

Where rubbish has been regularly dumped making alleyways unusable this is treated as fly tipping. Unless there is an immediate risk to residents this is likely to be treated as a low priority for clearance by SMBC due to the limited impact of the problem.

If an otherwise accessible alleyway is subject to an immediate problem relating to items such as a damaged tree or isolated fly tipping this may be responded to by SCH/SMBC where the danger is removed allowing for the ongoing use of the alleyway.

Where there is significant growth of vegetation this is an indicator that the alleyway is not in regular use and any response will fit within the usual delivery of service for responding to hedges and shrubs. During estate inspections conducted by SCH the condition of alleyways is part of the issues looked at, with problems reported and where resources permit action taken.

Ivy

An ongoing issue is where Ivy gets established either against the wall of a property or along a fence. This has the potential to cause damage to the surface it is growing on and even through the weight of the plant itself. SCH is proactive in tackling ivy when it becomes a concern.

When maintained properly ivy can be a feature of a garden and can be managed as part of an ongoing garden maintenance plan carried out by a resident. However, where the ivy is not being maintained then action is needed to prevent it from being destructive to structures, for example, fascia boards, roof tiles and other structures.

Dog fouling

Dog owners are responsible for cleaning up after their dog(s).

SCH responds to reports of dog fouling in communal areas and will carry out investigations. We will speak to and write to dog owners, but if the problem persists, enquiries will be escalated to the Tenancy team for further action.



Fire safety checks

One of the highest priorities for SCH is to ensure residents live in properties that are safe. This is achieved through a range of services including routine inspections on all aspects of a property.

There is a particular focus on high-rise buildings and Estates Services check the general condition and specifically the measures in place to control the impact if a fire were to break out within a building. An inspection is carried out weekly in the common parts of high-rise buildings to ensure that the fire control measures are in place.

Maintaining evacuation routes

A key part of fire safety is to ensure that the means of evacuating from a building is maintained. Estate Services remove items that are in communal areas of both high and low-rise buildings where they are considered to be a potential risk to the safe evacuation of a building.

All residents must be compliant with our Clear Spaces Policy, making sure that landings, stairwells, and communal areas are kept clear at all times. This approach means residents can be safely evacuated in the event of a fire, and the Fire Service can access all areas of the building with ease.

Abandoned vehicles

Abandoned vehicles present a range of safety issues including being a target for Anti-Social Behaviour and vandalism. The process through which a vehicle can be removed is legally precise where specific actions are needed to contact the owner before removal is possible. SCH and SMBC work jointly on this.

Regarding service targets, a vehicle that is an immediate hazard will be removed but usually SMBC do not consider a vehicle is abandoned unless it has not moved within the last 14 days.

The process of investigation can take some weeks after this, depending on whether the responsible person can be identified and the reason given as to why the vehicle may have not moved. SCH staff will be involved in the initial assessments and the issuing of the earlier notices with SMBC responsible for contacting the owner, the legal notices and ordering the removal of a vehicle.

Key and fob management

If you lose your communal key or fob then you will have to pay for a replacement. There will be a small fee for this service. Once payment has been received, please allow 2 working days after the date the order is placed for your new key/fob to be delivered.



Estate Inspections

SCH staff are active within the estates constantly though the week and the majority of the issues responded to are identified through this. Residents see the staff and can raise matters directly and can also use the SCH Call Centre to raise concerns. While this is the primary way in which matters are managed a more structured assessment of the condition of an area is also conducted.

Every 6 months SCH complete estate inspections. This involves inspecting properties and open spaces within a defined area where most properties are owned and managed by SCH. Typically, this will include looking at the shared space in and around properties and how the open space is being maintained and used. Additionally, pathways, alleyways, street lighting and any areas of fly tipping or accumulation of rubbish will be noted. Overgrown gardens, damaged garages and potential breaches of tenancies will also be noted.

While the estate inspections will result in direct action being taken by SCH these will also generate a number for referrals to different parts of SMBC for those services they provide. The inspections can also identify issues that require additional capital expenditure to resolve a particular problem which falls outside of the usual scope of routine services.

Notice boards

High-rise buildings all have notice boards usually on the ground floor adjacent to the lifts. This contains important information about services being provided to the buildings such as cleaning as well as having important safety information relating to the building and it's residents.

Environmental improvements

Where possible specific projects are initiated by the Estates Services to bring about improvements.

These are subject to funds being available and tend to concentrate on matters that need investment rather than maintenance.

These might be initiated from the SCH staff who are constantly observing issues within neighbourhoods, in response to initiative led by SMBC across the whole borough or as a result of opportunities highlighted by residents.





Tenant Responsibilities

There is a clear responsibility for SCH and SMBC to deliver services in a consistent and timely manner, along with an assumption that tenants will act reasonably and lawfully. The vast majority of those living in properties managed by SCH do so in a way that respects both their neighbours and the wider community. **There are specific behaviours expected from residents:**

Cleaning

Every effort should be made to avoid leaving litter in communal areas, bin chutes should be used properly, and staff employed to clean should not be obstructed in their work.



Rubbish

No one should fly tip. There are several ways bulky waste can be collected which can be accessed through the SMBC website or by contacting SCH. Fly-tipping is investigated with the possibility of legal action taken against those who are found responsible.

There is a schedule for collecting domestic waste and designated areas where this should be put. Black bags can be a problem where they block access ways or are accessible to animals.



Grounds Maintenance

Alleyways must not be used as a location to dump unwanted items or garden waste even if they appear not be being used. Concern about overgrown vegetation can be reported to SMBC and SCH. Dogs are wonderful pets and owners are expected to clean up after them.



Safety

A lot of effort goes into making high and low rise buildings safe and information about this is provided to residents who are expected to contribute by ensuring nothing blocks access routes and rubbish is put into the designated areas.



While individuals may disagree with some of the decisions that have been made about access and reducing fire risk, these are based on legal requirements and expert advice, all designed to make your home safer. Co-operation with all safety requirements is expected.



General

Although not a requirement, where an issue develops, the quicker this is reported the quicker a solution can be found. Residents are encouraged to alert SCH and SMBC to any matter that they feel needs a response.



SCH Estates Team

The SCH Estates Services Team is made of 13 posts.

2

Estates Team Leaders

Manages the team and oversees the day to day functions of service delivery.

10

Estate Caretakers

- North Solihull has 8 caretakers
- South Solihull has 2 caretakers

Responsible for designated area with high and low-rise buildings. This includes block inspections, estate inspections, pre-paid bulk collections and removal of fly-tipping.

1

Estates Admin

Provides administration support to the rest of the team.

How to report an issue



There are two main ways in which you can report an issue for Estates Services:

1. By calling through to our Contact Centre on 0121 717 1515
2. Through the SCH website online contact us forms

Other SCH staff will pass on any requests or concerns you have and while every effort is made to respond to tenants concerns by everyone working for SCH, this method of communication is less easy to track.



Appendix 1

Activity	Performance Criteria	Monitoring
Cleaning		
Communal cleaning of low-rise buildings and mews blocks	Cleaning of low-rise buildings takes place twice per week and Mews blocks once per week.	Service is audited every 3 months and feedback given through contract management process with external provider.
Communal cleaning of high-rise buildings	Three floors, ground floor and stairs are cleaned Monday to Friday. Bin chute blockages and removal of bio-waste 24 hours a day with immediate response (<i>1 hour target</i>)	Service is audited once a month and feedback given through contract management process with external provider.
Communal window cleaning	Cleaned annually	Service monitored at the time of delivery
Communal recycling bins	Weekly collection by SMBC contractor	Contractors are appointed to do the work
Bin store area	No specific target but must allow for refuse collection to be made	This is monitored by the Estate Caretakers on a weekly basis
Rubbish		
Fly-tipping in communal areas around buildings	No specific target but linked to SCH Tenant Satisfaction Measures	This is monitored by the Estate Caretakers via scheduled and ad hoc inspections
Litter picking in communal areas around buildings	No specific target but linked to SCH Tenant Satisfaction Measures	Directly employed staff complete the work



Fly-tipping in other areas	SCH remove within 5 working days. SMBC have a 20 week turnaround.	Contractors are appointed to do the work
Litter picking within Solihull	No specific target	Contractors are appointed to do the work
Grounds Maintenance		
Grass cutting	Between March and November every 12 working days	Service is audited by SMBC against standards set out in their contract
Hedge maintenance	Annual cut between November and March	Service is audited by SMBC against standards set out in their contract
Immediate issues relating to safe use of pathways	Reactive to issues and subject to risk assessment	Service delivered based on risk and monitored on completion
Tree maintenance and safety	Reactive service, no specific targets	External contractors are appointed and complete inspected work
Professional advice on how best to manage trees	No specific target but responsive	SMBC staff
Weed and growth clearance	Spray three times a year during spring and summer months	Service is audited by SMBC against standards set out in their contract
Leaf clearance	No specific new activity, incorporated into other services	Service is audited by SMBC against standards set out in their contract
Alleyways	No specific target for SMBC	Work tends to be incorporated into existing service provision
Immediate issues relating to the safe use of pathways	SCH react to issues and are subject to risk assessment	Service delivered based on risk and monitored on completion



Ivy growth	No specific target but responsive to SCH risk assessment	Delivered and monitored directly by trained SCH staff
Dog fouling	Reactive service	Contractors are appointed to do the work
Safety		
Fire safety checks	Checks made weekly	Contributes to overall safe management of high-rise buildings
Maintaining evacuation routes	Twice weekly checks. Reactive response to issues identified	Ongoing, reactive checks
Abandoned vehicles	Vehicle not moved for 14 days before investigation starts which can last some weeks.	SCH staff
Key and fob management	Chargeable service	Allow 2 working days after the order is placed
Wider Improvements		
Estate inspections	Every 6 months	Survey form completed
Notice boards	No specific target but will be inspected when staff in building	SCH staff
Environmental improvements	These are proactive and have no target	Each project has its own measures of success

