



PLYMOUTH COMMUNITY HOMES MOBILITY SCOOTER AND MOTORISED WHEELCHAIR USE AND STORAGE POLICY (and incorporating supporting guidance)

Version:	Version 3
Lead Directorate:	Homes and Neighbourhoods
EIA Completed:	February 2012
Approved by:	Customer Focus Committee – February 2012

1. Introduction

Due to the widespread expansion in the use and availability of motorised scooters / buggies / wheelchairs (mobility scooter), their popularity is now beginning to create issues in premises which were not designed to accommodate such vehicles.

Plymouth Community Homes (PCH) understands the benefits that these vehicles can provide and wishes to support all of our tenants and residents to retain their independence as much as is possible. However, the safety of all tenants, leaseholders, staff and visitors is a priority.

Whilst some tenants and leaseholders may wish to leave their mobility scooters in the communal areas of blocks of flats, this potentially raises a number of health and safety and fire safety issues. For this reason, this policy is aimed at reducing that risk whilst at the same time offering positive guidance to those tenants with mobility scooters.

Mobility scooters involved in fire can release large volumes of highly toxic smoke and gases. If stored in shared corridors and staircases (sterile areas), a fire in a mobility scooter could affect the means of escape and place an unacceptable risk to all occupiers within the building.

PCH is mindful that under current fire safety legislation (Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005) the expectation is that all common areas to flats (shared corridors, open balconies and staircases) are risk assessed and all risks and hazards eliminated for the overall safety of occupants.

This risk assessment has been undertaken by a competent firm of risk assessors. Their advice is that mobility scooters should not be allowed to be stored, parked or charged within the common areas of flats due to the risks mentioned above.

With the exception of Innes House, none of PCH's housing with support (sheltered) schemes has been specifically designed or adapted to accommodate the storage or

charging of mobility scooters. This means that if tenants cannot accommodate a scooter within their own home there may not be the necessary space within the communal areas of the scheme to store it safely.

Finding secure storage and charging areas for these vehicles is particularly difficult in communal schemes where safe access and fire safety is paramount. It is also important that these vehicles are not stored where they present a safety risk and/or nuisance to other residents and users.

2. The dangers of mobility scooters

The first picture below was taken after a fire, as a result of which two people died as the fire spread into the property via the adjacent window. The first two pictures also show fires that occurred in the open air. Fires within confined spaces, such as the common areas of buildings (corridors and staircases) will develop greater levels and smoke and the heat radiated in the corridor, etc, will be much greater. This, coupled with the principle that common areas of flats should not be fitted with automatic fire detection, means that any fire in a corridor has the potential to develop undetected for a considerable period of time.



3. Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service recommendations

The principal 'advice' to housing providers is that mobility scooters should not be stored / parked / charged in staircase enclosures, or communal corridors forming part of means of escape routes within buildings. This is because they introduce a considerable fire loading and the scooters can be an obstruction hazard within these areas.

In view of their 'advice' above, as the enforcing authority for the Fire Safety Order, the Fire and Rescue Service would expect this to be the minimum standard. As such, PCH could run the risk of enforcement / prosecution against them. Additionally, there is the possibility that the individual who has breached their tenancy / leaseholder conditions (and linked policies) may also be subject as an individual for the breach of the Fire Safety Order, and as such be liable to prosecution.

4. Aims of the policy

The aim of this policy is to protect and preserve the health and safety of all residents living within PCH housing and anyone visiting or working there, whilst enabling the use of mobility scooters to promote independence.

This policy is in place to give tenants and leaseholders information and advice on PCH's approach to managing the use of mobility scooters.

It applies to both general needs flats, maisonettes and sheltered housing blocks, and to existing tenants who already own or may wish to purchase a scooter and to applicants with scooters who are considering moving into a PCH home.

The term 'mobility scooter' used throughout this policy refers to all types of battery powered vehicles.

PCH encourages the rights of tenants to independent living. It also recognises that mobility scooters can and do enhance the quality of life for those people who may otherwise be limited in their ability to access facilities, either within a scheme or the wider community.

Where possible, PCH will work with residents to enable their use of a mobility scooter. However, the health and safety of other residents is paramount and permission cannot be given to store mobility scooters in communal areas.

PCH will strive to be as flexible as possible and where there is a risk associated with the storage or use of a mobility scooter we will work with the resident to try to find a solution.

The provision of storage and charging facilities for mobility scooters within PCH properties is challenging and sometimes impossible, as there is often no suitable space for storage or recharging facilities available. Where space is available,

adaptation or providing adequate facilities can be costly and would need to be planned and budgeted for.

PCH reserves the right to prohibit or restrict the use and storage in any of its schemes of any residents' personal possessions and equipment deemed to be unsuitable for the accommodation and communal areas. The type and nature of such possessions and equipment will be decided by PCH from time to time. The storage and use of mobility scooters within PCH schemes falls into this category.

5. Policy - supporting guidance

All enquiries with regard to use and storage of mobility scooters will be dealt with in a sympathetic manner in order for PCH to meet its obligations and to ensure certain minimum requirements are met.

The application of this policy lies with the Homes and Neighbourhoods teams.

Where permission is given for a scooter to be kept, it will be the responsibility of the Housing Officer or Housing with Support Officer to give the permission, subject to the guidance/criteria as set out below within the 'Key Principles' section.

New scooters (existing or new tenants)

Existing / new tenants or leaseholders wishing to buy a mobility scooter (either new or second-hand) should, prior to purchase, discuss and agree with the Housing Officer / Housing with Support Officer where the tenant or leaseholder proposes to store and recharge the scooter.

Existing scooters

The basic principle for the use of a mobility scooter is that it will normally be kept with a tenant or leaseholder's own property, or that the tenant or leaseholder will provide suitable storage external to the common corridors or staircases. It is the responsibility of the tenant to keep the scooter maintained and recharged.

If there is a scooter currently in a communal area, and it is not evident who owns it, the Housing Officer / Housing with Support Officer should attach a note to it asking the owner to make contact or stating that the scooter will be removed after a set period of time.

Where the owner is known, the tenant or leaseholder should be informed of the health and safety and fire risks associated with sorting / parking / charging the scooter in communal areas and advised that it should be stored / parked / charged within their own accommodation and not left in the communal area.

Adaptations to properties

PCH does not provide adaptation works to support the use or storage of a mobility scooter.

However, where a tenant or household member has already been prescribed a wheelchair for indoor and outdoor use through the NHS, the request may be considered in line with the PCH Adaptations Policy.

Leaseholders who have been prescribed a wheelchair for indoor and outdoor use through the NHS can also make an application to seek consent for their own works to the property to support scooter use. Each application will be considered on an individual basis.

Where adaptations will not be undertaken by PCH, tenants may wish to consider paying for works to support the use of a mobility scooter themselves, subject to any necessary permission.

Funding may be available from either statutory authorities (for example through a Disabled Facilities Grant, which is means tested) or charitable sources (for example, forces charities such as The British Legion or SAFA).

Key principles for the use of mobility scooters with PCH housing schemes

- The storage, parking and charging of a scooter within a common corridor or staircase enclosure is prohibited.
- PCH may prohibit a tenant from using a mobility scooter in a scheme if, by their general disregard for safety, they place other scheme residents, visitors or property at risk.
- Mobility scooters and wheelchairs are normally kept within a tenant's own property, and are the responsibility of the tenant to keep maintained and recharged.
- The practice of trailing wires across a corridor / escape route from a property to a scooter for charging purposes is prohibited.
- The ability of a tenant to get either on or off a mobility scooter must be achieved without assistance from PCH staff.
- Scooters should not be driven within any enclosed corridor faster than walking pace.
- The use of the scooter should be limited to enable the user to travel from the front door of the building to their flat entrance door. They should not be used in lounges, laundries, and storage areas, etc, where they can cause obstructions for other users.
- The storage of a scooter external to any scheme must be in such a manner that it does not cause any health and safety issues to any other residents, visitors or threaten the fabric of the building.
- Where storage and charging facilities have been provided by PCH and the resident prefers to use these facilities rather than store their vehicle within their

own home, the user will be subject to a service charge for the storage and charging costs.

- Failure to comply with the provisions of this policy and supporting guidance may result in a breach of tenancy and the tenant will be asked to remove the scooter from the scheme permanently.

Insurance and damage

- Insurance for mobility scooters is not mandatory by law. However, all residents of PCH will be required to show evidence of insurance annually, covering personal injury to others and damage to the property in the event of accidents, misuse or fire.
- Insurance covering damage, etc, within the resident's dwelling should be covered in the normal manner (contents insurance).
- Housing Officers / Housing with Support Officers will review the safe use, operation, storage and recharging of scooters / motorised wheelchairs as and when necessary. If a resident has been found to be causing damage to PCH property, the resident may be charged for the repair (in particular, damage to carpets, wall decoration and door frames within the common areas of the building).

Information note – storage of mobility scooters

Where it is not possible to store scooters in the tenant or leaseholder's home or within a suitable room within or outside the building, the following includes some examples of options:

- External waterproof covers – this option depends on whether there is space outside the tenant or leaseholder's home which will not cause an obstruction and where a power lead will not cause a trip hazard. We do understand these covers do not offer protection from theft.
- Manufactured scooter storage units – this is a secure unit with built in battery chargers, and may be an option for those living on the ground floor or in dispersed schemes. Planning permission may not be needed. However, this will need to be assessed by Housing staff also, to make sure the scooter will not obstruct access paths or windows. A secure power connection to the tenant's property would be required and a level surface available for the unit to be sited on.

The cost of any of the above options will be at the tenant / leaseholder's expense. Not being able to afford the solution cannot be allowed to override the safety issues of not having scooters in communal areas.

Advice on storing scooters, etc, with a tenant / leaseholder's home

- The scooter should be stored and charged within a room within the dwelling.

- The room should be fitted with a substantial door.
- When being stored or charged, the door to the room should be kept closed.
- The room used for storage or charging should be fitted with a smoke detector. If the room chosen to store or charge the vehicle does not already have a smoke detector, one should be fitted (and this should be at the occupier's expense).
- Recharging should be carried out only during day time hours and not overnight. Recharging should never be carried out in the corridors or communal areas of a building.
- Battery charging should be undertaken in a ventilated room (i.e. ensure the window to the room is open). Note – if charging maintenance free battery (sealed battery), ventilation is not specifically required, but it would be best practice.
- In the event of a fire, the vehicle should not compromise the occupant from reaching the flat entrance / exit door.
- If the scooter is to be stored for any length of time, the battery should be removed.

6. Data Protection

In applying this policy, all members of staff must comply with PCH's Data Protection Policy and ensure that the personal information supplied by customers is protected at all times.

7. Equality and diversity

PCH will apply this policy consistently and fairly, and will not discriminate against anyone based on any relevant characteristics, including those set out in the Equalities Act 2010.

PCH will make this policy available in other languages and formats on request.

PCH will carry out an equality impact assessment on this policy, in line with our corporate procedure.

8. Review

PCH will monitor this policy to ensure it meets good practice and current legislation and will review it in accordance with our review timetable for all policies.