

## **Shropshire Council – Festive Decorations - Policy Guidance**

### **Safe use of festive decorations**

This guidance note provides information on the restrictions and safe use of festive decorations and festive lights in Shropshire Council buildings.

The use of festive decorations presents a fire safety risk that will need to be managed at all locations.

Shropshire Council acknowledges this risk and aims to adopt a proactive approach to minimise the risk of fire caused by using festive decorations.

Building and Fire regulations provide strict controls on fire spread and combustibility on the surfaces of stairs and corridors, these requirements must not be ignored during the festive period and become more important in their implementation.

Where festive decorations are used the following criteria must be met:

#### **Decorations**

- Any decorations such as tinsel must be located away from heat and ignition sources such as light fittings, heaters and electrical equipment. They must also be clear from intruder and fire alarm sensors.
- Displays must not be located in escape routes including stairwells and lobbies, they must not impede the means of escape from the building.
- Combustible decorations must not be strung over corridors and in stairwell's.
- Staff must ensure that they take extra care when putting up decorations and must not stand on desk's, chair's or window sills.

#### **Christmas Trees**

- All artificial Christmas trees must be fire retardant and proof must be provided upon request.
- Ensure that Christmas trees are stable and cannot fall over.
- Do not impede the means of escape from the building.
- Fire action notices, fire alarm call points and fire extinguishers must not be obstructed and must remain clearly visible at all times.
- Power cables must not create a tripping hazard.

#### **Christmas Tree (Fairy or decorative) Lights**

Low voltage decorative fairy lights are the preferred option. Mains powered lights must be manufactured in accordance with BS EN 60598:2015 registered with the premises/building manager and PAT tested before use.

Check lights over before use:

- Never insert or remove bulbs when switched on.
- Inspect cables and bulbs for damage before use.

- Do not use lights which are damaged, dispose of them safely.
- Never fix lights in place with staples or nails.
- Decorative fairy lights must only be switched on during office hours and must be switched off when the office is unattended.
- Ensure that decorative fairy lights are switched off and unplugged at the end of the working day or when the office will be left unoccupied for long periods.
- Cables must not present a tripping hazard.
- Never attempt to join two sets of lights together or run them from the same plug.
- Only indoor lights must be used indoors.

**Please note:** Fairy lights went up in smoke causing 20 fires, while Christmas trees, decorations and cards were also a fire risk and responsible for 47 house fires in the UK, which led to 20 non-fatal casualties – source RoSPA.

### **Christmas Cards**

- Keep Christmas cards away from heating appliances and heat sources, such as light fittings.

### **Candles**

- Candles including birthday, aromatherapy or any other type of burners are not permitted in council buildings, due to the fire risk and risk of a fire alarm activation due to the smoke produced.
- Open flames must always be avoided.

**Please note:** Candles sparked around 1,000 UK house fires, resulting in 9 deaths and 388 casualties, in 2011/12 – source RoSPA.

### **Risk Assessment**

All decorations and displays must be risk assessed and the risk assessment signed off by the line manager, or the person responsible for the area/team concerned.

### **Actions Required:**

- Disseminate information to team managers as required.
- Remove any inappropriately positioned festive decorations and lights.
- Monitor compliance during routing safety inspections.
- Ensure mains powered lights are in a safe condition and PAT tested and within test date.