

Policy	Hoarding policy
Date adopted	May 2021
Date of next review	May 2024
Version	1
Responsible board	Homes board
Responsible officer	Head of neighbourhoods

1. Overall policy statement

- 1.1. The purpose of this policy is to set out our approach to hoarding by our customers and has the following objectives.
- ◆ To take action to stop hoarding as quickly and effectively as possible.
 - ◆ To take a balanced approach using a combination of measures including support, prevention, early intervention, and enforcement.
 - ◆ To provide a pro-active approach in the management of casework.
 - ◆ To treat those who hoard and those affected by hoarding with tact and sensitivity.

2. What is hoarding?

- 2.1. Many people collect items at some points throughout their life, however, there is a percentage of people for whom collecting becomes an unmanageable pattern of behaviour and between 2-5% of the UK population can be classed as hoarders.
- 2.2. Hoarding is not the preserve of any group of people, but collections are likely to grow as people age. People who hoard usually have some or potentially all of the following characteristics:
- ◆ An unusual and strong emotional connection to personal possessions/material things.
 - ◆ Difficulty organising, prioritising, or deciding to discard an item.
 - ◆ Experience anxiety and stress also symptom of a bigger mental health issue such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) or obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (OCPD)
 - ◆ Collecting items provides comfort and the individual can show symptoms from mild anxiety to panic attacks.
 - ◆ Socially isolated.
 - ◆ Exhibit self-neglect.
 - ◆ Exhibit churning – moving items around or storing them elsewhere so it appears they have been removed.
- 2.3. The three main types of hoarding have been identified as:
- ◆ Inanimate – newspapers, books, magazines, food containers, bottles etc.
 - ◆ Animals – cannot offer the basic care, has a substantial number of animals, poor hygiene.
 - ◆ Data - data storage, a considerable number of computers, etc.

- 2.4. Hoarding is believed to have a variety of triggers which include bereavement, physical and mental health problems, being in debt, feeling isolated, a sense of loss and career change.
- 2.5. Failure to identify and address hoarding carries several risks:
 - ◆ Fire and Rescue Services can be impeded by the number of items and the higher-than-normal fire loading can increase the severity of the fire or likelihood of the fire spreading to adjoining properties.
 - ◆ An increased risk of non-access for compliance inspections and remedial works and/or home condition does not allow for these to be undertaken.
 - ◆ An increased risk of accident and harm to the customer/household members.
 - ◆ Neighbours can be compromised through an increased opportunity for infestations from mice, rats, or insects.
 - ◆ Increased repairs and structural damage - as a hoarder is less likely to report or allow access to their home.
 - ◆ Significant management costs due to household clearance and the repair of empty homes.
 - ◆ Cost of legal action if enforcement action must be taken for breach of tenancy conditions.
- 2.6. At Housing Plus Group (HPG) we recognise that hoarding as a cognitive disorder as defined by the Mental Health Act 2013. Hoarding is a disorder which compels a person to purchase and/or acquire excessive quantities of objects and prevents or inhibits them from deciding to discard those objects. It is most effectively managed in partnership with other agencies and in co-operation with the person living with this disorder.

3. Our Policy aims to achieve the following

- 3.1. HPG will identify customers who may be experiencing problems with hoarding issues by a variety of means, including:
 - ◆ Through staff observations from tenancy visits.
 - ◆ Via regular visits for Retirement Living customers.
 - ◆ Via compliance checks such as annual gas safety checks, electrical inspections, and fire door inspections.
 - ◆ Via reporting from third parties, including neighbours, friends, family, advocacy groups or statutory enforcement agencies.
 - ◆ Via self-referral or requests for assistance.
- 3.2. Teams whose work requires them to visit a home will be supported by a robust procedure which will clearly identify the process to be followed when hoarding has been identified.
- 3.3. HPG will ensure visual aids are available to assess the extent of any hoarding via the 'Clutter Image Rating Scale' guidance. A process flow chart will clearly evidence responsibility and the expected actions following a referral. All these documents, along with an assessment and referral form, will be contained within the procedure.
- 3.4. Normally we will attempt to visit the customer suspected of hoarding within 5 working days to assess the level of hoarding. If there is a report of a risk of serious and immediate harm to the home, customer, or neighbours we will visit within 1 working day. If the customer is not available or they do not allow us into their home to carry out the assessment we will reschedule the visit to take place as soon as possible.
- 3.5. Whilst the difference between clutter and hoarding is recognised, it is important that clutter is addressed to prevent this increasing to a hoarding situation and will be proactively managed by the Neighbourhoods Team.

- 3.6. Hoarding cases are considered a specialised area, particularly linked to mental health, and should be referred for support via multi-agency hubs. Cases can be complex with low rates of success to achieve a positive resolution: a multi-agency approach should be established in each case as it is more likely to achieve a positive outcome.
- 3.7. Support from our floating support and wellbeing services can complement any support provided by external agencies.
- 3.8. In all cases a referral to the Fire Service for a 'Safe & Well' visit should be made and an application for a mental health capacity assessment will be considered. This policy will also work alongside our Safeguarding Policy.
- 3.9. It is important to recognise the positive impact family and friends can have on customers who are hoarding. In some cases, a family member or friend can persuade the customer to accept help where no one else has been successful.
- 3.10. All hoarding cases will be logged on a centralised system and an action plan will be developed in consultation with the customer with timescales and regular monitoring of cases undertaken.
- 3.11. If or when a customer recognises that they do need to remove items, the cost of this can be prohibitive to clearing the home. Whilst we will always try and identify partner agencies to provide financial support in the first instance, HPG may fund the provision of skips, disposal of items which cannot be reused, and cleaning of the home in the following circumstances:
 - ◆ Where all other avenues for obtaining support and assistance have been exhausted.
 - ◆ Where a contribution to costs is needed to support partnership working with Adult Care.
 - ◆ Where there is a cost neutral benefit to HPG when set against employee involvement and other costs such as day to day repairs.
 - ◆ Where conditions within the home prevent essential maintenance to be undertaken and causes a risk to the customer and home e.g., annual gas inspection, electrical survey or re-wire.

4. Enforcement Action

- 4.1. Hoarding can have a significant impact on employee time as they require long term input and support. Balancing the safety and wellbeing of the customers and the long-term condition of the home is a delicate process and HPG will engage and work with customers to alleviate the risk posed by hoarding to themselves, their neighbours, our staff and our properties.
- 4.2. If the case is not possible to resolve, or there is an immediate or obvious health and safety risk, enforcement action will be undertaken.
- 4.3. In undertaking legal action we will continue to consult and update any partners involved in the case.
- 4.4. In some cases, although the home may still carry signs of hoarding, where a customer has made good and undertaken the work required from the action plan, if there is no health and safety risk, we will continue to monitor the home.
- 4.5. Any reduction in hoarding must be supported by regular visits by the Neighbourhoods Team to monitor and ensure hoarding does not start again.

5. Re-housing

- 5.1. In exceptional circumstances we will consider the re-housing of a customer due to hoarding. Re-housing will only be approved where there is a clear safeguarding risk and where actions can be put in place so that the customer can successfully meet their tenancy obligations in the new home. Decisions will be in accordance with the Lettings policies and where necessary a management move request will be made.

6. Training of Staff

- 6.1. All staff dealing with Hoarding cases will be given the training required to be able to fulfil the responsibilities found within our policy.

7. Data Protection, Information Exchange and Confidentiality

- 7.1. We will adhere to relevant data protection legislation. We have an information sharing agreement in place with partners including the Police and Local Authorities which allows us to share information, where it is for the purpose of safeguarding the health and safety of individuals and/or preventing crime and/or disorder. This is made clear in our Privacy Statement on our website.

8. Monitoring and Review

- 8.1. Regular case management reviews are undertaken to ensure that hoarding issues are being dealt with effectively and within timescales.

This policy will be reviewed not less than every three years. Reviewing the policy will ensure that it is effective and complies with current legislation and good practice.

Risk Assessment

- ◆ The Group fails to maintain Consumer Standards in line with the objectives and framework set out by the Government (Risk Map ref: 6.2)
- ◆ Group policies do not incorporate current legislation, equality and diversity, or best sector practice and fail to protect the business (Risk Map ref: 1.2)
- ◆ Death or injury is caused due to carrying out maintenance or construction works on the Group's assets (Risk Map ref: 3.1)

Regulatory Issues

National Standards are Neighbourhoods & Community Standard and Tenancy Standard.

Links to Other Policies, Procedures or Documents

- ◆ Safeguarding Policy
- ◆ Hoarding Procedure
- ◆ Tenancy Policy
- ◆ Neighbourhood Management Policy
- ◆ Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- ◆ Compliance Procedures
- ◆ Lettings Policy

Supporting and Associated Information

- ◆ Care Act 2014
- ◆ Public Health Act (Control of Disease) 1984
- ◆ Environmental Protection Act 1990
- ◆ Prevention of Damage by Pests Act 1949
- ◆ Animal Welfare Act 2006
- ◆ Mental Health Act 1983 (amended 2007)
- ◆ Mental Capacity Act 2005
- ◆ Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- ◆ ASB (ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR) Crime & Policing Act 2014

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed every 3 years unless there are significant changes in legislation.

Impact Assessments

An Equality and Diversity impact assessment has been carried out and there is no adverse impact on any customer groups.



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