



HOARDING POLICY

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The following document sets out Rochdale Boroughwide Housing's (RBH) Hoarding policy, in relation to its housing stock and the safety and wellbeing of its customers.
- 1.2 This policy outlines the Society's commitments, aims and approach to preventing, addressing and resolving hoarding. Obtaining a successful outcome from managing a hoarding case requires an understanding of:
 - why hoarding occurs;
 - an adaptable approach to develop relationships with the customer;
 - good multi agency partnerships to draw on specialised support; and
 - partners who can develop relationships to encourage and support the customer.

2. Context

- 2.1 Many people collect items at some point throughout their life, however, there is a percentage of people for whom collecting becomes an unmanageable pattern of behaviour. Hoarding is a recognised mental health problem and between 2-5% of the UK population can be classed as hoarders.
- 2.2 Hoarding is not the preserve of any particular 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 making a decision to discard an item;
 - Experience anxiety and stress. 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 large number of animals, poor hygiene;
 - Data – data storage, large number of computers, etc.

2.4 Failure to identify and address hoarding carries a number of risks:

- Fire and Rescue Services can be impeded by the amount 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 accident and harm to the tenant/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 has to be taken.

3. Methodology

- 3.1 This policy has been developed following research into best practice within the housing profession and information from mental health practitioners. It has been supported by visits to other organisations to discuss and gather good practice. Consultation has involved front line Neighbourhood Housing Officers, Tenancy Support Officers and joint working with the Fire Service and RBC partners.

4. Aims and Objectives

Identifying hoarding cases

- 4.1 RBH will aim to identify all customers who display signs of hoarding as part of our safeguarding process. All employees are required to take part in safeguarding training and report cases of concern, including those of self neglect, to a nominated safeguarding champion and their line manager. Neighbourhood Housing Officers and Tenancy Support Officers have the opportunity to undertake specialised training relating to hoarding, should it be required. A briefing on identifying hoarding and the alerting process will be sent to other frontline teams in order to support this policy.

Procedures

- 4.2 Teams whose work requires them to visit a property will be supported by a robust procedure which will clearly identify the process to be followed when hoarding has been identified. RBH 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 within RBH and the expected actions following a referral. All these documents, along with an assessment and referral form, will be contained within the procedure.

4.3 Whilst the difference between clutter and hoarding is recognised, it is important that clutter is addressed to prevent this increasing to a hoarding situation. Pictures one to three of the Clutter Image Rating Scale will not be considered hoarding but considered low risk clutter and will be dealt with by the Neighbourhood Housing Team.

Support Offered to Address Hoarding Cases

4.4 Hoarding cases are considered a specialised area, particularly linked to mental health, and must be referred to the Tenancy Support Team who can begin to build a relationship with the customer to encourage and support a recognition of the need to remove items.

4.5 Hoarding cases can be complex with low rates of success and RBH is reliant on partner agencies to help achieve a positive resolution, therefore a multi agency approach should be established in each case, established by the Tenancy Support Team, as it is more likely to achieve a positive outcome and deliver long term support to the customer.

4.6 In all cases a referral to the Fire Service for a Safe & Well visit should be made and an application to adult care for a mental health capacity assessment will be considered.

4.7 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.

4.8 All hoarding cases will be logged on a centralised system and regular monitoring of cases will be undertaken. Weekly contact will be required and, once a suitable resolution is achieved the frequency of this contact could be reduced to ensure the hoarding does not continue or escalate.

Funding

4.9 If or when a tenant recognises they do need to remove items, the cost of this can be prohibitive to clearing the property. Whilst RBH will always try and identify partner agencies to provide financial support in the first instance, RBH has a budget to fund the provision of skips, disposal of items which can not be reused, and cleaning of the property.

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4.10 The use of this budget will only be allocated in the following cases:

- 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 RBH when set against employee involvement and other costs such as day to day repairs.

Enforcement Action

4.11 Hoarding can have a significant impact on employee time as they require long term input and support. Balancing the safety and well being of the tenants and the long term condition of the property is a delicate process and RBH will engage and work with customers to alleviate the risk posed by hoarding to themselves, their neighbours and RBH properties. If the case is not possible to resolve, or there is an immediate or obvious health and safety risk, enforcement action will be discussed and action agreed.

4.12 In some cases, although the property may still carry signs of hoarding, where a tenant has made good and undertaken the work required by RBH, if there is no health and safety risk, RBH will continue to monitor the property.

4.13 Taking enforcement action can be complicated and, dependent on the capacity of the tenant, could result in unintentional homelessness. It also has an impact on the relationship between RBH and the customer, causing distress and mistrust. Any cases referred for enforcement action will be discussed between managers in both the Neighbourhood and Tenancy Sustainment and Enforcement Team prior to consultation with Legal Services as to the most appropriate course of action.

4.14 In determining legal action RBH will continue to consult and update any partners involved in the case.

Resolved Hoarding Cases

4.15 Any reduction in hoarding has to be supported by regular visits by the Tenancy Support Team to monitor and ensure hoarding does not start again.

Rehousing

4.16 In some circumstances the condition of the property may cause a safeguarding risk or a risk to nearby properties. RBH will consider each case individually as to whether rehousing would benefit a customer, either through the provision of more in-depth support on site, as part of a wider support package with partners, or through down-sizing to a more appropriate property.

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In cases with an identified risk to nearby homes rehousing will be an expected outcome to prevent enforcement action. Applicants will be considered for a direct offer to limit the period RBH is managing the risk.

5. Scope

- 5.1 This policy covers all RBH tenants but is relevant to those who are identified as hoarders.

6. Equality & Diversity

- 6.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment relevance test has been carried out on this policy. The outcome of the test was a low rating and a full EIA was not required.

7. Monitoring

- 7.1 Hoarding cases are discussed and audited on a quarterly basis as part of casework review. Performance is monitored and reported to Communities Management Team within the overall work of Tenancy Support.

8. Review

- 8.1 All RBH policies are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they are fit for purpose and comply with all relevant legislation and statutory requirements
- 8.2 This policy, including any other related procedures, will be reviewed annually and formally reviewed and submitted to the appropriate approving body at least every three years.

9. Thematic Links with other SPSS Documents

- Safeguarding Adults Policy
- Safeguarding Children Policy
- Fire Safety Policy
- Anti Social Behaviour Policy
- RBC Allocations Policy