

HOARDING POLICY

Version Number	V6
Date of Current Version	July 2026
Approved by / Date	Executive Director of Customer & Communities / July 2026
Annual Review Date	June 2027
Full Review Date	June 2027

Executive Summary:
This policy outlines Rochdale Boroughwide Housing's (RBH) approach to tackling hoarding, in relation to its homes and the safety and wellbeing of its customers.

Policy Grouping / Directorate	Customer & Community	
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EIA Completed	Yes ☒	No ☐
Publication	Intranet ☒	Website ☒
Notes:		

1 Introduction and Aims

- 1.1 This policy outlines how Rochdale Boroughwide Housing (RBH) will approach instances of hoarding in our homes., in relation to the health and safety of our customers and their homes. It outlines how we will work with customers and partners to understand, support and tailor our approach to ensure we deliver effective, sustainable, and safe outcomes.
- 1.2 The aims of the policy are:
- To understand the different underlying reasons that can lead to hoarding.
 - To understand the difference between a hoarding disorder and a customer who displays hoarding behaviour.
 - To differentiate between hoarding and property condition cases.
 - To recognise the benefits of having an adaptable approach when working with individuals and families who hoard.
 - To understand the role of statutory agency partnerships and their legal obligations.
 - To identify customers who display signs of hoarding as part of our safeguarding process to ensure adequate support is put in place.
 - To treat each case on an individual basis and to look objectively to see the person and not the hoard.

2 Context

- 2.1 This policy has been developed following research into best practice within the housing sector and from NHS guidance on hoarding. The World Health Organisation (WHO) classifies hoarding as a medical condition (Appendix A – WHO definition).
- RBH recognises that effective management of hoarding supports compliance with the Regulator of Social Housing's Safety and Quality Standard and Neighbourhood and Community Standard through the management of health, safety, fire and environmental risks. The Safety and Quality Standard requires landlords to take reasonable steps to ensure tenant safety and manage risks within homes
- 2.2 RBH adheres to the following legislation in relation to hoarding:
- Mental Health Act 1983
 - Mental Health Capacity Act 2005
 - Care Act 2014 – Statutory Guidance
 - Housing Act 2004
 - Environmental Protection Act 1990
 - Equality Act 2010
 - The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
 - Animal Welfare Act 2006
 - The Public Health Act 1961
 - Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
 - Housing and Regeneration Act 2008
 - Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
 - Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

3 Values

3.1 The policy fits with the mutual values of RBH:

Putting People First: We listen with empathy, respond with compassion, and make it easy for our customers to access our services. This policy will help ensure a tailored, person-centred approach is followed when supporting customers who hoard. Our approach will be trauma-informed, sensitive, supporting and delivered in a caring manner.

Doing What We Say: We earn trust through honesty, integrity, caring and keeping our promises. We will explain clearly to customers when we need to work with them to deal with issues of hoarding and provide clear actions for ourselves and the customer.

Working As One: We embrace our mutuality and work together to deliver great outcomes for the people living in our homes and communities. We will ensure a person-centred approach throughout the journey whilst exploring collaborative working with our partners and agencies who can help support and reduce the impact of hoarding.

Delivering Quality: We invest wisely in our people and make it easy for them to deliver services and create places that our customers are proud to call home. This policy supports a forward-thinking approach to working with hoarders and our partners to find innovative and smart ways of working to resolve issues of hoarding.

Open & Transparent: We are curious, embrace diverse ways of thinking and seek feedback to help us improve. We will use professional curiosity, working openly with our customers and take into account their needs to help to fully manage the tenancy longer term.

4 Policy Statement

4.1 RBH recognises that hoarding is a complex issue. It is important that we understand what hoarding is, but that we also understand what hoarding is not. Assessing and identifying a person who hoards and understanding behaviours as to why they are hoarding is key to delivering the correct support. We understand that this may cause difficulties in engaging with RBH and other services.

4.2 We will always seek to see the person beyond the hoarded property. We will work proactively with individuals and multi-agency partnerships to safeguard and support individuals and their families, including children. We will do this in a trauma-informed manner to develop trust and provide choice for the customer.

4.3 Generally, some people with a hoarding disorder excessively acquire items that they do not need or for which no space is available and typically experience distress if they are unable or are prevented from acquiring items. Common features of the disorder include indecisiveness, perfectionism, avoidance, procrastination, difficulty with planning and organising tasks, coping with progress, maintenance, and sustainability.

4.4 The arrangement of possessions does not always indicate that an individual has a hoarding disorder. Some individuals live in various degrees of unsanitary conditions (squalor), that may be a logical consequence of severely cluttered spaces and/or related to planning and organising difficulties and yet may not have a hoarding disorder. Other causes could be an impairment of cognitive

function caused by an undiagnosed condition such as dementia or Diogenes syndrome.

4.5 RBH will consider the risks if an individual with hoarding issues is not correctly supported:

- The individual/family may be unable to work with services
- There is an increased risk of accident or harm to the individual/family
- Increased likelihood of not allowing access for compliance and repairs
- Risk of fire to individual, as well as fire spreading to neighbouring properties
- Increased risk of damp and mould
- Legal enforcement action and costs

In every case, RBH will make necessary referrals to our Fire Safety team and Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service for a risk assessment.

4.6 RBH must consider the tenancy agreement in terms of both hoarding behaviour and property condition. Clause 5.3 Internal Condition states: *You must keep the internal condition of the property to a reasonable standard at all times.* Clause 7.9 Hygiene states: *You must keep the property clean and tidy. If you don't, we will charge you our reasonable costs for any work we need to do because of this, such as removing rubbish.* Alongside this, RBH will seek to ensure that suitable tenancy sustainment provision is in place, and signpost for specialist appropriate if required.

4.7 Guidance issued under the Care Act 2014 places duties on Local Authorities to make enquiries where they have reasonable cause to suspect that an adult with care and support needs may be experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect. Whilst RBH does not have statutory safeguarding duties under the Care Act, we have an important role in identifying concerns, sharing information and making referrals to the appropriate agencies where safeguarding concerns are identified.

Where concerns relating to hoarding are identified, RBH will consider whether the individual may have care and support needs and whether they appear able to make informed decisions regarding their living environment and possessions. This may include consideration of:

- The volume of belongings and the impact on the safe use of rooms and living spaces
- Safe access and egress within the property
- The creation of fire, health, structural or other hazards
- Risks to the individual, neighbouring residents, employees, contractors or visitors
- The impact on the safety and condition of the building

Where there are concerns that an individual may lack capacity, be unable to protect themselves from harm, or may have unmet care and support needs, RBH will refer the matter to the Local Authority Adult Social Care team and work in partnership to support appropriate assessment and intervention.

Any decision regarding the removal or disposal of belongings will be made lawfully, proportionately and, wherever possible, with the consent and involvement of the individual concerned and any relevant statutory agencies.

5 Monitoring

- 5.1 We will monitor the effectiveness of our approach through customer feedback and monthly case audit reviews. Where appropriate we will use feedback from Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs) to inform our approach.

6 Review

- 6.1 All RBH strategies, policies, service standards and procedures are reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that they are 'fit for purpose' and comply with all relevant legislation and statutory regulations.
- 6.2 This policy will go through the full policy approval process every 3 years and will undergo a desktop review annually. This is to ensure that it is fit for purpose and complies with all relevant and statutory regulations.

7 Links with Other RBH Documents

- 7.1 This policy links to the following policies and strategies:
- Safeguarding Policy
 - Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
 - Fire Safety Policy
 - Rochdale Council's Allocation Policy
 - RBHs Property Condition Process

8 Inclusivity statement

- 8.1 We are dedicated to fostering an inclusive and equitable environment for all. We ensure that everyone is valued and respected. Our policies aim to be inclusive, and will comply with UK laws, including the Equality Act 2010, to create a diverse and supportive environment for people to thrive.
- 8.2 We understand not everyone absorbs information the same way. If you have any difficulty understanding or interpreting this document please email people@rbh.org.uk or call Freephone 0800 027 7769. We will work with you to ensure your individual needs are met.

Appendix A – World Health Organisation (WHO) definition of Hoarding Disorder

“Hoarding disorder is characterised by accumulation of possessions due to excessive acquisition of or difficulty discarding possessions, regardless of their actual value. Excessive acquisition is characterized by repetitive urges or behaviours related to amassing or buying items. Difficulty discarding possessions is characterized by a perceived need to save items and distress associated with discarding them. Accumulation of possessions results in living spaces becoming cluttered to the point that their use or safety is compromised. The symptoms result in significant distress or significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning.”