

RUNNYMEDE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Housing Services Hoarding Policy

DRAFT

Review due:

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy outlines how Runnymede Borough Council deals with hoarding in homes managed by the Council.
- 1.2 Hoarding can be a manifestation of social or mental health issues, the impact on the individual can be serious and is likely to increase isolation and reduce contact with agencies.
- 1.3 Hoarding has been identified as a growing problem that has potentially serious and costly implications for housing providers, these include:
- Risk management challenges
 - Health and safety concerns
 - Escalating legal costs
 - Safeguarding issues.
- 1.4 Compulsive hoarding can be a complex issue, requiring a collaborative and integrated approach.
- 1.5 This policy ensures there is a meaningful and coordinated multi-agency partnership working to effectively resolve problematic hoarding.
- 1.6 The Council takes a non-judgmental approach to dealing with hoarding cases and understands the complexities involved in this mental health condition.

2. Aim

- 2.1 This policy sets out how Runnymede Council responds to hoarding and what tenants are expected to do to ensure their safety and well-being. The Council aims to:
- Develop an understanding of why hoarding has occurred and put an action plan in place to help tenants manage their environment.
 - Have a flexible approach in developing and maintaining our tenant relationship where hoarding is identified.
 - Promote safeguarding and multi-agency working.
 - Work with partners to deliver specialist services for and with our tenants who need it.
 - Promote fire safety and mitigate the risk of fire.
 - Ensure the health and safety of all the Council's tenants.

3. Scope, definitions and legislation

- 3.1 The NHS definition of hoarding disorder is where someone acquires an excessive number of items and stores them in a chaotic manner, usually resulting in unmanageable amounts of clutter. The items can be of little or no monetary value. It is common for people who hoard to also suffer with other mental health conditions¹.

¹ [Hoarding disorder - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

3.2 Hoarding is considered a significant problem when:

- The amount of clutter interferes with everyday living
- The clutter is causing significant distress or negatively affecting a person's ability to function- for example, their social life, employment and maintaining a safe environment.
- It makes cleaning difficult, leading to unhygienic conditions or infestations.
- There is an increased risk of fire and exits are blocked.
- There is an increased risk of trips and falls.
- There is an increased risk to other residents in a block.
- The condition of the property breaches tenancy conditions.

3.3 This policy considers the following legislation:

- The Care Act 2014
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Mental Health Act 1983
- Human Rights Act 1998

4. Policy Details

4.1 The Council recognises that each case is different in terms of the type and extent of items hoarded, the risk, and the reasons behind the hoarding. Dealing with such cases is complicated and time-consuming. However, the Council takes action to achieve an outcome which is positive and sustainable for tenants, although there may be a requirement for repeat action.

4.2 The Council is likely to become aware of hoarding/clutter issues:

- During routine and/or planned maintenance works required at the property
- When complaints of anti-social behaviour are received; for example, those concerning the presence of vermin or clutter in outside spaces.
- When reports of welfare concerns from family members/anonymous/external services or neighbours are received.
- When access is denied to a property for a routine inspection or other issue.
- When a safeguarding referral is made.

4.3 Staff will take into account the sensitive nature of this issue but will make the tenant aware of any breaches of their tenancy agreement and will take appropriate action following the Hoarding Procedure. Staff will work with tenants and adopt a multi-agency approach to provide appropriate support, advice and signposting as required.

5. Causes of Hoarding

5.1 There is usually a reason for hoarding: objects are claimed to be sentimental; the tenant may feel that the objects they are keeping may become useful, or they are keeping them 'just in case' they need them again. The tenant may find it difficult to discard things and have problems with decision-making, organisation, and order generally. They often acquire more things than they throw away, and if they do throw them away, they will struggle to cope with the feelings of loss.

5.2 Compulsive Hoarding is associated with:

- A family history of hoarding
- Lack of relationships with family or friends
- The experience of deprivation.
- Struggling to cope with a stressful life event.
- Growing up in a cluttered home
- Another mental health condition, such as anxiety, depression or social phobia

5.3 Whatever the cause of hoarding the Council will engage with the hoarder and other agencies to work towards a resolution. Where this is not possible tenancy enforcement action will be taken to protect the tenant exhibiting hoarding and the welfare of other residents.

6. Mental Capacity

6.1 Consideration will be given at an early stage to mental capacity, to determine if the tenant has the mental capacity to understand and make informed decisions regarding the concerns around their apparent hoarding behaviour.

6.2 The Mental Capacity Act applies to everybody who has dealings with people who may lack capacity, particularly if they have a professional relationship with the person.

6.3 We will comply with the requirements set out in the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and will consider the Act's five key principles during interactions with tenants:

1. A person must be assumed to have capacity unless it is established that he lacks capacity.
2. A person is not to be treated as unable to decide unless all practicable steps to help him to do so have been taken without success.
3. A person is not to be treated as unable to decide merely because he makes an unwise decision.
4. An act done, or decision made, under this Act for or on behalf of a person who lacks capacity must be done, or made, in his best interests.
5. Before the act is done, or decision is made, regard must be had to whether the purpose for which it is needed can be as effectively achieved in a way less restrictive of the person's rights and freedom of action.²

7. Intervention & Support

7.1 The Council will identify tenants who may be hoarding, by using the Clutter Rating Scale. This is a nationally accepted method of categorising hoarding and uses stock approved photos so assessments by agencies are consistent and understood. Where tenants display behaviours that pose a risk or have a detrimental impact on themselves and others around them, we will in most cases take a graded approach to intervention. Each case will be assessed on an individual basis and responses will be appropriate to the circumstances of the person involved.

7.2 Staff will always explore what support is required and make the necessary referrals.

² [Mental Capacity Act 2005 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](http://legislation.gov.uk)

7.3 Where a hoarder is engaging and accepting assistance, the Council will:

- Persevere to find ways to engage with the tenant and we will work over a long period of time to get a result.
- Find the right person who can best engage with the tenant.
- Set up multi-agency meetings early on to determine who has the best engagement and how efforts can be co-ordinated most effectively.
- Invest in resources as these cases take a disproportionate amount of time compared to other cases. Damage because of hoarding can result in costly repair works so preventative work is key and cost effective in the longer term.
- Provide support to tenants with clearing their property.
- Arrange for items to be collected to clear the property and ensure the tenant does not bring items back into their home.
- When a case is resolved, ensure that the right support is in place through check-up visits and partnership working to avoid repeat episodes of hoarding.

7.4 Where a hoarder is not engaging and is unwilling to accept assistance, the Council will continue to work with partner agencies while enforcing tenancy conditions to ensure the health and wellbeing of the individual and the wider community.

8. Risk Management

8.1 Hoarding increases risks for the hoarder, other residents and the Council:

- Fire hazard– Accumulation of combustible materials such as newspapers, clothing and rubbish. Items can also extend into the communal areas of a block.
- Structural Damage – If there is damage to the property this is a danger to the occupants, public safety and potentially adjacent buildings.
- Disease and injury– Storage of hoarded items makes cleaning nearly impossible, which can lead to tripping/falling, unsanitary living conditions, increasing the risk of disease.
- Infestations – Increases the chances of pests within the property and wider block/area.
- Social isolation – Distancing from people so they do not become aware of the hoarding.
- Impact on mental health – Decline in mental health due to hoarding and feelings of isolation and embarrassment.

8.2 Where there is a risk to the health, safety and wellbeing of tenants, contractors, staff and/or the public due to hoarding tendencies, the Council will carry out works to return the property to a safe standard. The tenant may be charged for works carried out in relation to this that fall outside the landlord's legal obligations.

8.3 The risk of a fire starting is increased by hoarding as combustible materials are more likely to be stored close to, or in contact with heat sources. Access to and from the home can also be restricted meaning the person's escape may be slowed down or prevented in the event of a fire. Fire loading (the storage of excessive quantities of combustible material) in hoarded properties presents risks to neighbours as it increases the likelihood of fire travelling.

9. Consultation

9.1 Our partners have been consulted.

10. Monitoring and performance management

10.1 We aim to review this policy in three years to ensure it reflects current legislation and the latest examples of best practices.

10.2 Tenancy Services will monitor the number of hoarding cases and outline actions required.

11. Equalities Implications

11.1 In producing this document an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) screening has been carried out.

11.2 An EIA is a way of assessing the impact, or likely impact, that a particular policy, procedure or decision will have on specific groups. This is used to assess whether in making the decision whether the Council has complied with its public sector equality duty under S149 of the Equality Act 2010 (as amended) to; eliminate discrimination and any other conduct that is prohibited under this act and to advance equality between those who share a protected characteristic.

11.3 The screening found that this policy does not require a full impact assessment as the policy aims to have a positive impact on all customers as hoarding can increase risks such as fire hazard, structural damage, diseases, injury, infestation, social isolation and impact on mental health. This policy will hope to minimize these risks by working with tenants who are hoarding as appropriate.

11.4 This policy will also streamline the Council's approach to dealing with hoarding cases and ensure each case is assessed on a case-by-case basis and referrals sent to other support services where required.

12. Related strategies/Documents

Tenancy Agreement
Public Health (Control of Disease) Act 1984
Environmental Protection Act 1990
The Mental Capacity Act 2005
Antisocial Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 s(2)(1)c
The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

13. Version Control

Version Number	Date Amended	Comments	Date Approved	Author	Approved By
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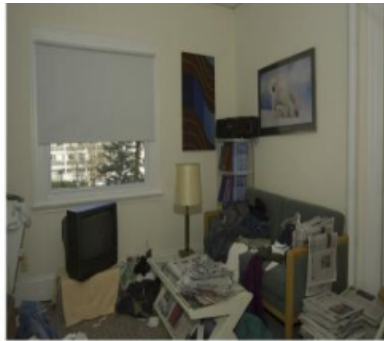
V1	August 2024	First draft		Daniel Lloyd	

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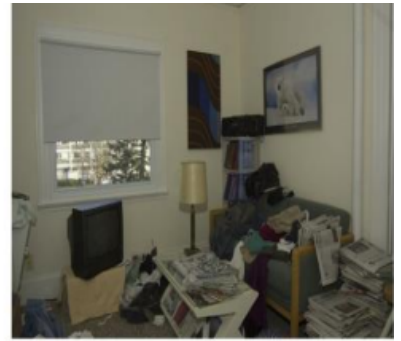
Clutter Scale Rating



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