

Report title	Housing Hoarding Policy
Report author	Maggie Ward
Department	Housing
Exempt?	No

Purpose of report:

To resolve

Synopsis of report:

Members are asked to approve a consultation with residents and stakeholders on a draft Housing Hoarding Policy

Recommendation(s):

Members approve a 4-week consultation with stakeholders on a draft Hoarding Policy

1. Context

- 1.1 Tenancy Services have historically dealt with hoarding and worked with other agencies however a policy was not in place to confirm the Council's approach to this issue.

2 Report

- 2.1 Hoarding has been identified as a growing problem that has potentially serious with costly implications for housing providers, these include:

- Risk management challenges
- Health and safety concerns
- Escalating legal costs
- Safeguarding issues.

- 2.2 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 them.
- Promote fire safety and mitigate the risk of fire.
- Ensure the health and safety of all the Council's tenants.

- 2.3 The Council will identify tenants who may be hoarding, by using the Clutter Rating Scale. The Clutter Rating Scale is a nationally accepted method of categorising hoarding, and the pictures used are stock images approved and utilised by support agencies. 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.

3 Policy framework implications

- 3.1 The Council has an obligation to ensure that the homes it manages are safe, under the tenancy agreement tenant must refrain from causing risks through hoarding. The tenancy agreement and this policy will provide a framework for tenancy enforcement against a tenant if the preventative approach and multi-agency support offered does not resolve the problem.

4 Resource implications/Value for Money

- 4.1 No additional resources are required for implementation of this policy, a preventative approach to resolving hoarding will be cost effective.
- 4.2 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, or discretionary assistance may be given.

5 Legal implications

- 5.1 Hoarding per se is not an unlawful action but depending on the nature of the activity it can have an impact on the safety and quality of life of occupants of units and neighbours. By way of example an individual living in a flat may hoard old newspapers to such an extent that it may create a fire risk and may exceed the weight load of the floor. In such instances the Council can take action under the terms of the tenancy agreement or via public health legislation to address the issue. As highlighted in the body of the report the policy which the Council proposes to adopt will seek to identify why a particular type of hoarding may cause a problem and set out a proportionate approach the Council will adopt to dealing with such matters.

6 Equality implications

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

7 Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications

- 7.1 None Identified

8 Risk Implications

- 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 (storage of an excessive quantity of flammable substances such as paper) in hoarded properties presents risks to neighbours as it increases the likelihood of fire travelling.

8.4 This policy seeks through preventative working and a multiagency approach to mitigate the risks of hoarding to the Council and the tenant.

9. Consultation

9.1 Members are asked to approach a consultation exercise with residents and stakeholders including, Adult Social Care, Surrey Fire & Rescue, Police, Mental Health Services, GP practices.

9.2 This policy formalises existing good practice and has no change to tenant's rights or obligations. A 4-week consultation will provide opportunity for comments from stakeholders and enable the policy to be brought back to this committee at an early opportunity for implementation.

10 Other implications

10.1 This policy contributes to the Runnymede Borough Council Corporate Business Plan Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Analysts have placed greater emphasis in recent years on the importance of what's known as the 'wider determinants of health'. While it's for the NHS to treat health problems, the Council can create a social and physical environment which supports good health. The Council owns just under 3000 homes and good management of hoarding will support the health and wellbeing of these residents.

11 Timetable for Implementation

11.1 A 4-week consultation to commence following approval with the results and a final draft to be brought back to this committee.

12 Background papers

None

13 Appendices

Appendix A - Draft Housing Hoarding Policy

Appendix B – EQIA