



HOARDING POLICY

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1.0 Statement

Radcliffe Housing Society (RHS) recognises the importance of dealing with issues that arise when properties are cluttered or being used to hoard large amounts of possessions. This policy and its related procedures details how RHS will deal with residents hoarding items in their home or garden with the aim to balance the rights of the tenant, with the duty of RHS to tackle issues that can cause a health and safety issue.

2.0 Aims

The aims of this policy are to:

- Ensure all our homes are safe to live in and that isolated hoarding cases do not pose a threat or nuisance in the community
- Engage with customers in order to improve living conditions categorised as hoarding and to provide information on further support where required
- Facilitate positive and sustainable outcomes for customers, by involving them in the process at all stages
- Maintain tenancies with RHS and use enforcement action as a last resort

3.0 Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to:

- Provide a clear procedure when dealing with incidents, including RHS's standard identification of customers who hoard so that staff have a framework for their actions
- Mitigate against the risks presented by hoarding behaviours
- Engage with the agencies best placed to support residents with hoarding behaviour to change the pattern of behaviour
- Ensure value for money in the implementation of the policy, to secure maximum benefit for RHS's expenditure of resources.

4.0 Definition of Hoarding

4.1 Hoarding is viewed by social care researchers as an aspect of self-neglect, in particular a neglect of the physical environment. It is seen as its own discreet mental health condition, defined as a 'persistent difficulty discarding or parting with possessions, regardless of their actual value' (5e of the Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders).

4.2 A "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.

5.0 Characteristics of Hoarding

- Persistent inability to part with any possession, regardless of its value
- Excessive attachment to possessions, including discomfort letting others touch or borrow them or distress at the idea of letting an item go
- Cluttered living spaces, making areas of the home unusable for the intended purpose, such as not being able to cook in the kitchen or use the bathroom to bathe
- Keeping newspapers, magazines, or junk mail
- Letting food or waste build up to unusually excessive, unsanitary levels
- Acquiring unneeded or seemingly useless items, such as trash or napkins from a restaurant
- Difficulty managing daily activities because of procrastination and trouble making decisions

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- Moving items from one pile to another, without discarding anything
- Difficulty organizing items, sometimes losing important items in the clutter
- Shame or embarrassment
- Limited or no social interactions by the hoarder

6.0 Risks and other issues presented by hoarding

- 6.1. Hoarding poses a significant risk to occupiers living in the property and those living nearby. Where a property is identified as hoarded regardless of the risk rating, occupiers need to be advised of the increased risk and identify a safe exit route.
- 6.2 Appropriate professional fire safety advice must be sought. This information will be shared with appropriate emergency services by alerting them to hoarded properties. This allows rescue services to respond appropriately. Once properties are cleared the information must be updated. A fire safety check undertaken by the fire brigade may be appropriate.
- 6.3 Hoarding can prevent access to services and parts of a property to inspect, maintain them or make it unsafe to do so. Hoarding can damage a property, where the weight or nature of the items hoarded cause disrepair. Hoarding can prevent maintenance issues such as a leak or vermin infestation from being visible.
- 6.4 Hoarding can result in smells, pests and a visual impact that affects the ability of other residents to enjoy the use of their homes.
- 6.5 The hoarder and their family members are likely to suffer an impact to their physical health due to issues of air quality, mould, pests and inability to fully use their environment.

7.0 Mental Capacity Act

- 7.1 We recognise capacity and consent are central themes in hoarding and that every adult has the right to make their own decisions. A person is assumed to have capacity to do so unless it is proved that they do not.
- 7.2 A referral will be made to the Local Authority Social Services Team where there are concerns a person lacks mental capacity, so that a Mental Capacity Assessment can be made.
- 7.3 The principles of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 are:
- A person must be assumed to have capacity unless it is established that they lack capacity.
 - A person is not to be treated as unable to make a decision, unless all practical steps have been taken without success.
 - A person is not to be treated as unable to make a decision, merely because he makes an unwise decision.
 - 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 or her best interests.
 - Before the act is done, or the decision is made, regard must be had to whether the purpose for which it is needed can be as effectively achieved in a way that is less restrictive of the person's rights and freedom of action.

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8.0 Intervention

- 8.1 People hoard / acquire items for the same reasons as anyone else, including sentimental value or utility value (item is / could be useful). The hoarder may view their behaviour as a lifestyle choice; therefore discretion will be used when tackling hoarding issues.
- 8.2 We will take action when the hoarder's behaviour negatively impacts on the hoarder's life, or on others. For example, when:
- It is associated with self-neglect or safeguarding concerns
 - It is contributing to a pest control issue
 - It has health and safety implications
 - We are being hindered from carrying out a statutory duty (e.g. annual gas safety check)
- 8.3 We will remain objective during each case and assess living conditions on whether each room can be used for the intended purpose and whether there are any health and safety implications.

9.0 Agency Involvement

- 9.1 "Hoarding Disorder" is a complex condition and involves issues of capacity and potentially safeguarding (neglect and self-neglect). We are committed to providing a multi-agency response. It is recognised that hoarding is a complex condition and that a variety of agencies will come into contact with the same person. We will provide a multi-agency response through relevant referrals to support agencies.
- 9.2 Local Authority social services departments have a responsibility to carry out Care Act assessments where someone appears to need care and support, and to carry out a safeguarding assessment where someone is experiencing a significant risk to their health and safety (even where that may be a result of self-neglect). The Care Act 2014 and the Mental Capacity Act 2005 are the relevant pieces of legislation.
- 9.3 Complex cases can be referred to the Safeguarding panel, or where one is set up, the Self Neglect and Hoarding Panel (SNAHP), if professionals feel a multi-agency approach is needed or if relevant professionals are not engaging.
- 9.4 Before making a referral, our staff will discuss the situation with the resident and explain why they feel a referral is appropriate. It is preferable to have the resident's consent for this. If they do not provide consent, consideration will be given to whether they have the capacity to refuse, and whether there are safeguarding issues for other members of the household. In these circumstances a referral will still be made, and the safeguarding lead notified.
- 9.5 Fire Rescue services offer free home fire safety visits and are especially keen to carry these out where a significant risk has been identified.

10.0 Responsibilities

- 10.1 This policy and associated procedures are the responsibility of the Operations Director who acts as the designated officer in relation to the Hoarding Policy.
- 10.2 All staff and our contractors are responsible for identifying potential hoarding issues in our properties and this must be directed back to the Tenancy Services Officer or Independent Living Officer.

11.0 References

- RHS GDPR Policy
- RHS Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- RHS Hoarding Policy
- RHS Self Neglect Policy
- RHS Whistleblowing Policy
- RHS Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- Safeguarding and Vulnerable Group Act 2006
- Care and Support Guidance 2014
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Care Act 2014
- Criminal Justice Act 2003
- Health & Social Care Act 2012