



MANCHESTER  
CITY COUNCIL

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## **1. Introduction & aim**

1.1 This policy aims to outline how Housing Services will effectively address and reduce hoarding within Manchester City Council homes in north Manchester.

1.2 This policy and accompanying procedure sets out how Housing Services staff identify and support tenants where they are exhibiting hoarding behaviours, as well as clearly setting out the minimum standards tenants and families can expect.

## **2. Hoarding definition**

2.1 Hoarding disorder is now a recognised mental health condition, and is defined by the NHS as “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”.

2.2 Hoarding is recognised within the Care Act 2014 as one of the manifestations of self-neglect and requires all public bodies to safeguard individuals at risk of harm and neglect.

2.3 Hoarding can become a risk in someone’s home when:

- The amount of clutter interferes with everyday living e.g. a person cannot use a room for its intended function or they cannot access certain areas of the property.
- The property poses a health and safety risk e.g. a fire risk or increased risks of trips and falls.
- The clutter causes significant distress or negatively affects the quality of life for the person or their family e.g. the person becomes overwhelmed when someone tries to clear the clutter.

2.3 There are three main types of hoarding:

- Inanimate objects (the most common) - newspapers, books, magazines, food packaging, glass or plastic bottles etc.
- Animals – unable to offer the basic care to any pets they may own or have in their possession. Have a large number of animals, who may be living in unhygienic conditions and not cared for.
- Data storage – large number of computers, electronic storage devices or paper. A need to store copies of emails or documents in an electronic format.

## **3. Scope**

3.1 This policy covers all Manchester City council tenants in north Manchester and families living within the property, who have been identified as exhibiting hoarding behaviours.

3.2 The policy covers the following areas:

- Safety – identification of risks to anyone residing in a council property where there is hoarding, as well as risks to the property itself e.g. fire risk and an inability to complete repairs and improvements.
- Health & wellbeing – empowerment of residents to improve their health, wellbeing and living conditions by working in a trauma-informed way and ultimately aiming for long term sustainment.
- Awareness – increased awareness amongst staff and residents around hoarding, the reasons behind why someone may exhibit hoarding behaviours and the support available within Housing Services.

#### **4. Principles of the policy**

4.1 We will have a fit for purpose hoarding policy and procedure in place, available to all staff in order to take the most effective action to manage hoarding within our properties.

4.2 We have dedicated Support & Wellbeing Officers employed to work directly with residents exhibiting hoarding behaviours, who work in a trauma informed and person centred way to look beyond the hoarding to tackle the root cause.

4.3 We will commit to continuous review of training needs to ensure all customer facing staff are able to recognise hoarding and have the tools to talk to residents about the issue and are aware of the support available. All customer facing staff will receive Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma informed training.

4.4 We will continually review and implement best practice, including working closely with partner agencies including Adult Services, Community Mental Health Teams, Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service and GPs in order to support residents.

4.5 We will ensure new tenants are made fully aware of their responsibilities under the tenancy agreement. We will support all tenants to manage their tenancies appropriately, making referrals to external support services as and when necessary.

4.6 We will only use legal powers available to us under housing legislation and the tenancy agreement as a last resort. We will ensure that all other avenues have been explored before taking this option.

## **5. Context of hoarding**

- 5.1 We recognise that there is a difference between collecting and hoarding; as many people collect items throughout their life, however do so in a manageable way. Hoarding is usually very disorganised, to the point where it takes over a room or even a whole property, and the person exhibiting hoarding behaviours often has a very strong emotional attachment to the items, beyond the monetary value.
- 5.2 It can be present on its own and is recognised as a mental health condition, but may also be associated with another condition such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (OCPD), attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety and depression.
- 5.3 Hoarding behaviour is often linked to a person experiencing a traumatic life event such as a death of a partner or family member.
- 5.4 Due to the complexities around hoarding, people who exhibit hoarding behaviour can be challenging to engage at first. They may not see it as a problem, or recognise it as hoarding, or they may not understand the risks associated with their living conditions or the impact it is having on others.
- 5.5 People exhibiting hoarding behaviour are often ashamed due to the stigma associated with the condition; feel guilty, ashamed or humiliated, and so are reluctant to reach out for support.
- 5.6 Hoarding behaviour increases the risk of self-neglect, as defined within the Care Act 2014, which makes it an increased safeguarding concern for adults and also any children within the household.
- 5.7 It is therefore vitally important that hoarding behaviours are identified at the earliest possible stage, and that when it is the person is encouraged to engage with Housing Services and other agencies in order to have the best possible chance of a successful outcome. A reluctance to engage can lead to further isolation and mental health difficulties. A balanced, multi-agency approach, working in a trauma-informed and person centred way is the most effective way to support someone exhibiting hoarding behaviours.
- 5.8 Anyone, from any background can exhibit hoarding behaviour. It does not favour a particular gender, age, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, educational background or tenure type.

## **6. Characteristics of hoarding**

6.1 People exhibiting hoarding behaviours will identify with a large variety of characteristics, some of which will be kept hidden and not obvious at first glance. These characteristics include, but are not limited to:

- Fear and anxiety – hoarding may have started as a learnt behaviour, or following a traumatic event such as a bereavement. The person may believe buying or saving things will relieve the anxiety and fear they are experiencing. Often, any attempts to discard these items, particularly using 'crisis cleans' can induce feelings from mild anxiety to panic attacks with severe fear and anxiety. Any professional relationship built at this stage, will likely break down.
- Inability to discard items – someone may hold unexplained emotional attachment to items within their home that is not obvious to others.
- Long term behaviour patterns – often when someone is identified as exhibiting hoarding behaviours, it has been something they have been suffering with for a number of years, even decades. This can lead to the person having extreme difficulty in permitting others to touch or move their items, and as they have become used to living in such a cluttered property, they may be resistant to living in a more minimalist environment.
- Indecisiveness – some people who exhibit hoarding behaviours struggle with decisions around discarding items that they no longer need, including general waste or broken items.
- Self-care – someone exhibiting hoarding behaviours may appear unkempt or dishevelled, due to an inability to access washing or toilet facilities in their home.
- Perfectionism – perfectionism can get in the way of our priorities by causing us to focus on insignificant details instead of the big picture. This can lead to people focusing on one aspect, rather than the general condition of the property.
- Social isolation – people exhibiting hoarding behaviour will tend to alienate family and friends, fail to engage with support services and are often embarrassed to have visitors in their homes. This can lead to refusal to allow home visits by professionals including repair appointments, which can keep the true extent of the risks hidden.
- Poor insight – for some people, they do not have an insight into the risks their hoarding can pose to themselves or others e.g. neighbours and the risk of fire.

## **7. Mental Capacity**

7.1 The Mental Capacity Act 2005 is underpinned by five principles, which are contained within the act and explained in the Mental Capacity Act code of practice:

- A presumption of capacity - every adult has the right to make his or her own decisions and must be assumed to have capacity to do so unless it is proved otherwise
- The right for individuals to be supported to make their own decisions - people must be given all appropriate help before anyone concludes that they cannot make their own decisions
- That individuals must retain the right to make what might be seen as eccentric or unwise decisions
- Best interests - anything done for or on behalf of people without capacity must be in their best interests
- Least restrictive intervention - anything done for or on behalf of people without capacity should be an option that is less restrictive of their basic - as long as it is still in their best interests.

7.2 When someone is identified as exhibiting hoarding behaviour, it should be assumed that the person has capacity to make decisions, unless they have been diagnosed as lacking capacity. This would be identified by contact with the person's GP or with Mental Health Services.

7.3 If there are concerns around someone's capacity, contact should be made with Social Services via the Contact Centre (01612345001) and an assessment requested.

## **8. Executive Functioning**

8.1 Executive Functioning describes someone's ability to utilise information around their actions and the consequences of their action and/or inaction. An individual may be deemed to have capacity around decisions they are making around their living conditions, they may be able to understand the consequences of not engaging with support agencies to improve their living conditions and reduce risks and/or understand the risks their living conditions pose, however there may be a concern around their ability to utilise this information and put it to use to address the situation.

8.2 This raises concerns around an individual's executive functioning, and where there are such concerns appropriate referrals should be made to Social Services for discussion around the most appropriate support and multi-agency working to support the individual.

## **9. Implementation**

9.1 Potential hoarding may be identified by a number of means, and all Housing Services staff have a responsibility to be aware of the hoarding policy and procedure and be able to provide up-to-date advice to tenants and families and direct any queries to the appropriate team.

9.2 We may be made aware of a potential hoarded property by:

- A tenant themselves.
- A family member.
- A neighbour.
- A repairs operative or contractor.
- A Housing Services member of staff.
- Another agency e.g. health professional, care worker or statutory agency.

9.3 Once a potential hoarding case has been identified a referral will be made immediately to the Neighbourhood Housing Team, and a case will be opened by a Neighbourhood Housing Officer. Please refer to the procedure for guidance on managing a report of suspected hoarding.

9.4 Any decision to progress any hoarding cases to the Community Safety Team for consideration of legal action will be taken by the Tenancy Support Manager.

## **10. References**

10.1 The duty to safeguarding adults is underpinned in legislation. Key legislation relating to safeguarding adults includes, but is not limited to:

- Care Act 2014
- Manchester Safeguarding Partnership Self-Neglect & Hoarding toolkit
- Care and Support Statutory Guidance 2016
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Safeguarding Vulnerable People Act 2006
- Modern Slavery Act 2015
- Counter Terrorism & Security Act 2015
- Data Protection Act 2018 (as amended)
- General Data Protection Regulations 2018
- Public Disclosures Act 1998

10.2 To ensure Northwards Housing complies with current legislation and practice relating to safeguarding adults, this policy is linked to the Manchester Safeguarding Partnership ([www.manchestersafeguardingpartnership.co.uk](http://www.manchestersafeguardingpartnership.co.uk)).

## **11. Linked documents**

11.1 Documents linked to this policy include:

- Hoarding procedure
- Safeguarding adults policy & procedure
- Safeguarding children policy & procedure
- ASB policy & procedure
- Self-neglect policy & procedure

## **12. Responsibility**

12.1 Overall responsibility for the policy is with the Director of Housing Services. Each Head of Neighbourhood Services is responsible for performance within their geographical area of responsibility. One of the Heads of Neighbourhood Services has overall thematic responsibility for Hoarding.