

CARE & SUPPORT POLICIES, PROCEDURES & GUIDELINES

CS39 – HOARDING

1. INTRODUCTION

1 Purpose

- 1.1 The Hoarding Procedure sets out the approach that Community Options staff will take when dealing with hoarding.
- 1.2 It applies to all clients living in homes supported by Community Options.
- 1.3 The procedure aims to balance the rights of the tenant, with Community Options duty to deal with issues that can cause a health and safety issue.

2 Definition

- 2.1 Hoarding has been classified as a mental disorder and is a specific type of behaviour characterised by:

Acquiring and failing to throw out a large number of items that would appear to have little or no value to others (e.g. papers, notes, flyers, newspapers, clothes).

Severe cluttering of the person's home so that it is no longer able to function as a viable living space.

Significant distress or impairment of work or social life.

- 2.2 People who hoard may keep things 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, and to some extent this is the case.
- 2.3 However, it is when it negatively impacts on the hoarder's life or on others that it becomes an issue which requires action to be taken. 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

The organisation is being hindered from carrying out a statutory duty (e.g. annual gas safety check)

3 Implementation

- 3.1 Throughout the implementation of this procedure, staff must remain objective and should avoid making judgements on the tenant's living conditions. Instead, the focus should be on the property as an asset, whether the room(s) can be used for the intended purpose and whether there are health and safety implications.
- 3.2 Each case will be different in terms of the type and extent of items hoarded, the risk, and the reasons behind the hoarding. We therefore use a combination of intervention measures, including support to tackle the hoarding. In doing this, we will take a multi agency approach, where appropriate.

4 Responsibilities

All Staff

- 4.1 All staff are responsible for identifying clients where hoarding may be occurring and reporting this to the relevant Housing Management Officer and Resident Services Manager in the Local Services Team.

Contract Managers (and equivalents)

- 4.2 Contract Managers (and equivalents) are responsible for forwarding concerns that are reported by grantees or contractors or other agents to the relevant Housing Officer in the Local Services Team. Grantees, contractors or other agents are responsible for making Community Options staff aware of any concerns in relation to hoarding.

Managers and Housing Management Officers

- 4.3 Managers and Housing Management Officers are responsible for acting as the central contact point that responds to concerns of hoarding. They are responsible for keeping these cases under review and liaising with other relevant agencies

5 Identifying Hoarding

- 5.1 Any member of staff who has concerns that a tenant may be hoarding must report this to their line Manager the Manager in turn should report concerns to the Housing Management office and Contracts Manager where appropriate.
- 5.2 Other situations where hoarding behaviour may be identified include:

Complaints or concerns registered by neighbour (pests, smells, unusual behaviour)

Information from a statutory agency

Where a concern about a garden raises a concern about the condition of the property

Home Visit and Hoarding Checklist

- 5.3 The Housing Management Officer (or an alternative staff member if the tenant is more willing to engage with them) should visit the property and use the Hoarding Checklist (HOARD01) to identify whether the condition of the property meets the threshold for hoarding.
- 5.4 Housing Management Officers must use The OCD Foundation's Clutter Image Rating scale (HOARD02) to record the level of hoarding and should consider whether the room can be used for its purpose, e.g. can the kitchen be used for cooking, or can the bathroom be used for washing or to go to the toilet?
- 5.5 Housing Management Officers should also consider whether there are any health and safety concerns, e.g. storage of gas bottles, or storing items that could attract pests and vermin.
- 5.6 Photographic evidence is very important in all hoarding cases and the tenant should be made aware of the requirement to take photographs. Client consent to take photographs should be obtained using Part 3A of the Hoarding Checklist (HOARD01). If the tenant refuses consent, the Housing Management Officer should use the OCD Clutter Image Rating scale to record the level of hoarding at each home visit.
- 5.7 If the property condition meets the threshold for hoarding, the Housing Management Officer should agree the most appropriate course of action with the Service r. This could include (but is not limited to):
 - Referrals to external agencies
 - Visits to the tenant
 - Developing action plans
 - Enforcement action
 - Engaging with friends, family or colleagues who have a good relationship with the tenant (But taking data protection considerations into account)
 - Multi agency meetings
- 5.8 The role of the Service Manager and Housing Management officer is also to consider any vulnerability or safeguarding issues.
- 5.9 It should be noted that the risk posed by the behaviour of the client may change during the life of the case. Each case should be monitored by the Manager and Housing Management Officer and the checklist should be completed again if any staff member becomes aware of factors that significantly alter the risk.

- 5.10 Contact with the client (either in person or by letter) should warn the client that failure to allow access and comply with other terms of their tenancy agreement is a breach of tenancy and could result in enforcement action being taken.

6 Action Plans

- 6.1 Action plans should be realistic, proportionate and tailored to the individual client, taking into account the following factors:

The tenant's capacity and ability to carry out work

The severity of the condition of the client's property

The risk of serious harm or accident as a result of the condition of the property

Resources of support agencies involved with the client

- 6.2 Wherever possible, action plans should be agreed with the client.
- 6.3 Actions should normally be agreed in stage and should include the support available from Community Options staff.
- 6.4 The action plan should be confirmed in writing to the client.
- 6.5 Monitoring and regular visits should take place to review the progress of the action plan.
- 6.6 If at any point, access is not gained or the tenant stops engaging this should be referred immediately to the Landlord.

7 Failure to gain access to the property

- 7.1 Where Housing Officers visit the property and are unable to access the property, they must record each attempt at contact made.. If the tenant does not answer the door, a 'Missed Visit' card should be left.
- 7.2 The Housing Management Officer should write to the tenant to make them aware that they have attempted to visit them, with an appointment time for a repeat visit and asking the tenant to contact the Housing Management Officer if the appointment time is not convenient.
- 7.3 Housing Management Officers should be flexible in working around the commitments of the tenant. In cases where the tenant has attempted to delay access for more than 2 weeks, the Housing Officer should insist on arranging an appointment with the tenant to ensure access is gained.
- 7.4 If at the pre-arranged visit the client again refuses entry or is not present at the property then a second appointment letter should be sent stipulating the date and time of the visit. This appointment should be made to attend within one week.

- 7.5 In some circumstances where the client repeatedly refuses access to the property, then it may be necessary to consider contacting the Landlord regarding enforcement action to gain access (where there is a high risk issue, enforcement action may be considered earlier).

8 Support and referral to external agencies

- 8.1 Where family or friends are already involved, and willing to co-operate, we encourage their assistance, however in doing this we will always comply with data protection principles. Our priority is to engage with the client personally, wherever possible.
- 8.2 Where the client is already engaging with a support service, we will try to work alongside this existing arrangement. This is important where the hoarder already has an established relationship, as hoarders can at times be mistrustful of new services.
- 8.3 Where a referral has been made to other organisations, it is essential that these are followed up to ensure that the case is progressed.

Fire Safety Referrals

- 8.4 Where it is believed that a tenant could be vulnerable to fire, the Housing Management Officer must make an urgent Home Fire Safety Check Referral to the Health & Safety Manager. Referrals should be sent to: healthandsafety@Communtiy Options-housing.co.uk within 24 hours of the first home visit.
- 8.5 The Health & Safety Contract Manager in Property Services must also be informed of any high risk fire cases so that they can be flagged on the Fire Risk Assessment database.

Safeguarding Referrals

- 8.6 Where there is a concern about the tenant in relation to safeguarding, this should be discussed with one of person's care team and where necessary, a safeguarding alert raised in accordance with the Safeguarding Policy & Procedure.

Environmental Health and other referrals

- 8.7 In some circumstances, hoarding cases should be discussed with the local Environmental Health Team to determine whether it is a statutory nuisance.

9 Clearance

- 9.1 Where the client is willing to engage, it may be possible to help them to plan and manage their own clearance, or engage with an organisation who can assist them.
- 9.2 It may be helpful to set small goals to be accomplished stage by stage. These should be prioritised. For example, clearing a room that houses a boiler with an outstanding safety check, or re-establishing cooking and washing facilities.

- 9.3 Where the client is engaging in the clearance, Housing Officers should assign them time-framed tasks and get them to consider the relevance of the item to its current setting, and to either assign it an alternative suitable storage place or choose to discard it. This method results in items only being stored in appropriately assigned rooms (for sleeping, eating, cleaning, etc).
- 9.4 However, it should be recognised that due to the complexities of hoarding, removal of the items without support being in place for the client will not necessarily resolve the situation in the longer term as they may begin hoarding again and an enforced large scale clean up could cause extreme anxiety to the tenant.
- 9.5 Each case will be dealt with on an individual basis. Where there is a serious risk, we will always take action in relation to a clearance (preferably with the agreement of the client, but where there is a high risk an injunction may be required). There may be a recharge for the costs of the work.

10 Enforcement action

- 10.1 Enforcement action should only be considered where there is full agreement from the Landlord and as part of a multi agency approach.

11 Mental capacity and disability

- 11.1 Before taking any enforcement action, Housing Management Officers will need to consider whether the client has mental capacity. If they think that there could be an issue with mental capacity, a medical assessment will be needed to determine whether they have capacity. If they are found not to have mental capacity, they will need a litigation friend before action can commence.

12 Record keeping

- 12.1 It is crucial that all officers involved in the case keep records of all action taken, this includes . But is not limited to):

Attempts to contact the client (both telephone calls and visits)

Details of the condition of the property (including photographic evidence)

Referrals to internal officers

Referrals to external agencies

Support plans and risk assessment (when support is in place)

Action plans developed with clients

Letters should be sent to confirm what action has been agreed

Whether the client adheres to any agreements made

13 Review process

- 13.1 The Manager and/or Housing Management Officer should keep the case under review, until any risk from the hoarding reduces to an acceptable level.
- 13.2 When the risk is at an acceptable level, the Manager and/or Housing Management Officer should continue to keep the situation under review, but at less frequent intervals. This is to ensure that the risk is maintained at an acceptable level and hoarding issues have not returned.

14 Staff safety

- 14.1 Staff should ensure that all visits are carried out in accordance with Community Options' Lone Working Policy & Procedure.
- 14.2 Advice should be sought from the Health and Safety Manager if officers have any concerns about entering a property.
- 14.3 If a Housing Management Officer or other members of staff has any concerns about entering a property, they should discuss this with the relevant Manager, Team Leader and/or the Health & Safety Manager.

15 Connected documents

- 15.1 Other documents to be read in conjunction with this procedure include (but are not limited to):

- Tenancy agreement
- Anti-social Behaviour Policy & Procedure
- Tenancy Management Policy
- Health & Safety Policy
- Fire Safety Policy
- Safeguarding Adults Policy & Procedure
- Safeguarding Children Policy & Procedure
- Vulnerable Residents Policy & Procedure

16 Hoarding Process Map

