

# Northampton Partnership Homes



## Hoarding Policy and Procedure

February 2017



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## **HOARDING POLICY STATEMENT**

This Policy and Procedure outlines Northampton Partnership Homes (NPH) approach to dealing with issues of clutter and Hoarding in its properties.

NPH recognises that some tenants 'collect' or 'hoard' possessions that they do not want to part with and this can become a problem for them and the landlord. However hoarding is a complex problem and ranges in seriousness.

## **SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES**

This Policy and Procedure sets out how NPH will respond to tenants who are living in cluttered homes.

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

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

This Policy and Procedure gives employees to have some clear guidelines for dealing with this complex problem. Whilst NPH will provide support and help to facilitate practical solutions for tenants who are hoarding, consideration will also be given to appropriate enforcement action being used.

## **Definitions**

Compulsive hoarding means excessively acquiring items that appear of little or no value and not being able to throw them away resulting in unmanageable amounts of clutter.

In May 2013 Hoarding Disorder was officially recognised in the DSM-V (the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders). It is common for people who collect to suffer with other mental health problems, such as Obsessive Compulsive Disorder or anxiety or depression. In these cases the effects of their mental health problems may be affecting their ability to make decisions about how they live and to deal with the problems.

However some people who hoard things may not necessarily have any mental health problems and they can be capable of leading active and rewarding lives away from their homes.

Hoarding becomes a significant problem when:-

1. The amount of clutter interferes with everyday living – for example, someone is unable to use the kitchen or bathroom and cannot access rooms.

2. 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.

Some research has shown that hoarding is more prevalent in men but that more women will present for support.

There is no distinction between age, gender, ethnic group, socio-economic status, education or occupation.

91% of compulsive hoarders have at least one other mental disorder.

It is usual that there has been a family history of OCD/hoarding.

Only 5% of hoarders come to the attention of professionals

Diogenes Syndrome is defined as “extreme self-neglect, domestic squalor, social withdrawal and apathy with a tendency to hoard”. They may be particularly drawn to hoard rubbish. It is often associated with dementia, alcohol dependency, psychosis or OCD.

OCD is characterised by either obsessions or compulsions, or both, and affects 1-3% of the population. Hoarding occurs in 20-30% of patients with OCD.

## **Causes of Hoarding**

There is always a ‘reason’ why someone hoards, objects are claimed to be sentimental, they are pretty or the tenants may feel that the objects they are keeping may come in 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 may be buying things that they may feel will ‘make them happy’. 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.

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 such as bereavement
- § Growing up in a cluttered home
- § Another mental health condition, such as anxiety, depression or social phobia.

Hoarders do tend to have a typical profile, they may collect items that have no monetary value, such as junk mail or carrier bags, or items that they try to reuse or repair. When visiting regularly it may be obvious that they have not thrown anything away and are just moving items from one place to another. It may be clear that they are struggling to manage

everyday tasks such as cooking, cleaning and paying bills. They may not socialise and find it hard to maintain relationships.

## **Risk Issues**

Hoarding increases risks for both tenant and NPH:-

- Fire – Accumulation of combustible materials such as newspapers, clothing and rubbish.
- Structural Damage – If damage to the property is a danger to the occupants, public safety and also danger to adjacent buildings.
- Disease, injury and infestations – Because storage of hoarded items makes cleaning nearly impossible, which can lead to unsanitary living conditions, increasing the risk of disease.

In the cases of unsanitary and disease then joint working with Environmental Health and the Fire service will be essential.

NPH will hold a register of 'Hoarding' cases and the level of risk will be monitored.

## **Procedure for employees dealing with cases of clutter/hoarding.**

It is important to gain trust and a relationship with the tenant.

### **DON'T**

- § Use judgemental language such as squalor, self-neglect, dirty or rubbish.
- § Use words that devalue or negatively judge possessions
- § Let your non-verbal expressions say what you are thinking.
- § Make suggestions about the person's belongings
- § Try to persuade or argue with the person
- § Touch the person's belongings without them giving you permission to do so.

### **DO**

- § Try to imagine yourself in the tenant's shoes.
- § Use encouraging language
- § Highlight their strengths
- § Focus the intervention initially on safety and organisation of possessions and later work on discarding.

## **Steps to Follow**

1. Once a tenant has been identified as 'hoarding' a risk assessment needs to be completed. **Appendix A.**

2. The clutter image rating guide should be used to assist in assessing the seriousness of the hoarding and the impact that is having on the tenant's ability to move comfortably around the property. **Appendix B.**
3. The Housing Officer should complete a referral to the Support Team, and attach the risk assessment and relevant photographs. The Housing Officer should make the tenant aware that the referral is being made and also that the tenant is in breach of their tenancy.
4. The Support Team Leader when receiving the referral will enter the case onto the Hoarding Register, and ensure that the case is listed to be discussed at the next panel meeting. The case will be referred to a Support Officer.
5. The Support Officer will call to arrange a visit within 5 working days, and the initial visit will be arranged within 14 days of receiving the referral. For those cases that score 8 or 9 then a visit will be arranged within 48 hours.
6. The Support Officer will make a decision at this time with regard to other Safeguarding considerations. It may be necessary to take advice from the NPH Fire Officer, and consider if involvement of other agencies is required such as:-
  - § Community Mental Health Team
  - § Adult Care Team (Safeguarding).
  - § RSPCA if animals are involved.
  - § Children Services/schools
  - § General Practitioner
  - § Environmental Health
  - § Northampton Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS) Community Fire Safety Group
7. The Support Officer will devise a joint action plan with the tenant. **Appendix C.**  
**It is important to set realistic target times** for properties to be cleared. The tenant should be advised regularly that failure to rectify the hoarding could result in enforcement action.
8. Joint visits should be arranged with Tenancy Compliance Officers early in the process, so that they can discuss the enforcement actions that could be considered.
9. The Support Officer should consider a range of options for the tenant, one of which could be to move the tenant on a permanent basis into more suitable housing, particularly where the tenant may be under-occupying the property or is over 55 where Older Persons Housing may be more suitable for them and easier for NPH to monitor in the future.
10. The tenant should be made aware that if moving is the preferred option that they may be re-charged for any damage or clearance of the property.
11. Moving the tenant may not be their preferred option because the tenant is likely to have difficulty 'letting go' of their items. However it will be important for the tenant to agree that no further potential hoarded items will be brought into the property.
12. In extreme case of hoarding where a serious health and safety issue has been identified and where there is damage to the property, but the tenant does not wish to move permanently, then it may be necessary to decant the tenant to allow access to the accommodation. This may cause storage issues and the tenant may have to be recharged for the period the goods are in storage.
13. In the case of a permanent move or a Decant, the move should be planned and the Support Officer should work with the tenant to arrange packing and discarding of items before the move can go ahead.

14. If the tenant refuses to move on a temporary basis then legal action should be considered, particularly if there has been no progress on clearing the property. The Support Officer will visit in line with the agreed action plan. Progress should be recorded.
15. Once the agreed timescale has passed the Support Officer will have to make a decision on the case. This should be:
  - a). Close the case as the property has been cleared to a satisfactory standard.
  - b). Agree an extension on the timescales.
  - c). Refer the case to the Tenancy Compliance Team to commence Legal Action against the tenant.

If the property has been cleared to a satisfactory standard and the tenant has no other areas of required support then case should be passed back to the Housing Officer who will arrange regular property inspections to ensure that the tenant has not returned to the previous hoarding behaviour.

The tenant should be issued with the 'Top Tips for helping to reduce the risk of Fire'.

**Appendix D**

**Recording of Cases**

All cases of serious hoarding will be held on a central risk register and discussed at the 'Serious Case Panel'. Action plans will be discussed and progress monitored.

**Monitoring**

This Policy will be kept up to date and amended accordingly to reflect any changes in response to revised legislation, regulatory guidelines and standards.

The processing of Personal and Sensitive Personal Data collected from Tenants and third parties in connection with this Policy will be undertaken in accordance with the Principles of the Data Protection Act 1998. A full copy of NPH Privacy Statement is available on the Information Commissioners Website and NPH Website. **Appendix E and F.**

Document Status	Draft for Approval
Responsibility	Head of Rehousing and Support

Last Review Date	February 2017
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## Risk assessment form

To be used during inspection of suspected hoarding issue.  
Complete as appropriate

<b>Address details</b>	
<b>Name and DOB of tenant</b>	
<b>Tenancy type</b>	
<b>Tenant</b> List any known vulnerabilities/disabilities/ medical issues Discuss consent form to liaise/refer to other agencies GP & contact details	
<b>Household members</b> Details of other occupants residing in the property (inc DOB and vulnerabilities) List any pets?	
<b>Type of hoarding and where</b> Detail initial observations Especially if you are unable to access all the rooms	
<b>Household Functionality</b> Can kitchen be used for cooking safely? Use clutter rating to assess level of clutter in each room Estimate height of clutter in each room  Estimate available floor space Assess level of sanitation in the property	

<p>Assess level of hygiene in the property  Is tenant on any medication are special storage measures required for this ? eg insulin  Check for other risky behaviour  Eg use of candles , fairly lighting multiple socket use  Any history of hoarding  Any history of fires at the property or for this tenant?  Should future visits take place using protective clothing ? if yes why ?  Should there be visits in pairs only ? is yes why ?</p>	
<p><b>Health and safety factors to be checked in property</b>  Does the property have working smoke alarms?  Does the property have utilities?  Is there gas supply ? is gas safety check up to date ?  Is there electricity supply ? is electrical safety check up to date?  What gas appliances are in use ?  What electrical appliances are in use ?  Are there any particularly inflammable items being hoarded ( eg lots of paper, petrol cans lots of cardboard boxes ?  Detail the volume of any particularly inflammable items being hoarded  Assess the access to all entrances and exits to the property  Concerns of Fire or Environmental Health risk to tenants and others?  Smoke alarms in working order (address urgently if not ) ?</p>	
<p><b>Structure and type of property</b>  Flat/house?  Loft space access?  Is loft also full of belongings? Arrange a check if not known</p>	

<p>Missing doors ?          Poor or no access/exit hampered by hoarding          Blocked stairwell/hallway?          Access to boiler?          Does property join neighbouring properties if so how? Terrace?</p>	
<p><b>Control measures/advice given</b>          Immediate advice given .....          Smoke alarms to be installed if none present          Fire service assessment completed?          Referrals to statutory services for MH or care and support tenant aware?          Request GP details ?          Discussed options for support via NHH to help address issues?          Action plan agreed?          Explained consequences/enforcement action of failure to address the issues to tenant</p>	
<p><b>Safeguarding adult and children</b>          Consider level of clutter rating if over 7 could potentially be a safeguarding issue depending on who lives there</p>	
<p><b>Animals</b>          Are there any pets at the property ?          Detail any concerns about these pets          Is there animal hoarding?</p>	
<p><b>Garden areas</b>          Check the garden detail condition of garden          Is there any signs of vermin</p>	
<p><b>Date and name of visiting officer(s)</b>           Date for next visit</p>	

Attach to action plan	
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If the situation is judged to be serious clutter 5+ in most rooms and there is a high risk of potential harm to the occupier and others advise what immediate action needs to be taken?

Where immediate action is required to reduce high risks identify what needs to be done straight away and allow tenant 5 working days to address those immediate high risk issues consider need to pursue legal action if this is not done (emergency injunction needs to be sought if tenants fails to adhere to these requests).

Ongoing hoarding and property condition issues need to be managed through the action plan

## Clutter image rating Kitchen

Select the photo that most accurately reflects the amount of clutter in this room



1

2

3



4

5

6



7

8

9

# Clutter rating Lounge

Select the photo that most accurately reflects the clutter in this room



1	2	3
---	---	---



4	5	6
---	---	---



7	8	9
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## Clutter rating bedroom

Select the photo that most accurately reflects the amount of clutter in this room



1

2

3



4

5

6



7

8

9

**Appendix C  
Action Plan**

(To address property condition and hoarding issues identified during inspection and agreed with tenant)

Which room(S) or areas are affected and how are they affected	What needs to be achieved (agreed action and outcome )	By when and by whom	Support identified and agreed	Any other agency involvement (detail actions and activities)	Progress and date of check (to be filled in by officer monitoring the action plan
<i>e.g Living room</i>	<i>e.g the rubbish needs to be removed and surfaces cleared. There needs to be a clear pathway through the room.</i>	<i>e.g Ms Smith with assistance from family</i>	<i>e.g support worker will assist with a plan and arrange removal of the rubbish that is bagged up.</i>	<i>e.g social worker</i>	<i>e.g visits will be completed weekly.</i>


Record any other relevant information in the boxes of this line					

Signed by officer leading on action plan

Date

Signed by tenant in agreement of the plan above to improve the property

Date

Action Plan achieved on (insert date )

Signed by both parties

Follow up visit in 6 months need to be planned in officers diary)



## Tips for helping hoarders reduce the risk of fire

If you store large amounts of possessions in and around your home you can help keep yourself safe from fire by following the advice below. These are small simple steps that you can do yourself to help keep you safe.

Make it a priority to clear the area on and around your cooker or hob

Do not place items on or close to heaters lamps or other electrical equipment or gas appliances.

Do not store cylinders in your home these are a very serious hazard during a fire. If you have a medical need for cylinders to be in or home they must be kept upright (outdoors if possible). Do not store cylinders in basements on balconies under stairs or in cupboards with electrical equipment or meters.

If you smoke make sure you use a proper ash tray at all times and keep this on a stable flat surface. Never leave burning cigarettes unattended, always ensure you have extinguished your cigarette fully.

Avoid using candles and tea lights. If you do use candles make sure they are in heat resistant holders and they are on a flat stable table away from inflammable items such as curtains and soft furnishings. Never leave them unattended.

Make sure you have working smoke alarms installed in every room in your property. Test them regularly to make sure they are working. Contact NHH if you need new smoke alarms. The local Fire service can advise further or carry out a home safety check if you would like one.

Plan and practise how you would escape from your home should a fire start. Choose a couple of options to exit the property and ensure these routes are always kept clear. This will also help the fire service access the property should they need to attend.

Do not stack items to a height that they become unstable, if the room was filled with smoke these could easily be knocked over and block the exit routes you have planned.

Newspapers and mail when stored in bulk are highly combustible and will cause fire to spread rapidly . Make sure you sort and dispose of these items every day recycling paper in the appropriate waste units.

If you have a fire in your property do **NOT** try and put this out yourself –leave the property straight away and call the fire service once you are safely outside. Do **NOT** go back inside for anything you think you should have removed. Try and alert your immediate neighbours .

*Appendix E*

## Your Information and Data Protection

Northampton Partnership Homes collect, process and store personal information about you and other household members in order to operate as NBC's Housing Management Organisation. NPH is a registered provider of social housing.

When you provide information about other household members we assume that you do so with their full knowledge and consent.

The information gathered in this questionnaire allows us to meet our contractual commitments to you as part of the Tenancy Agreement.

We will only ask for personal information that is appropriate to enable us to deliver our services. In some cases, you can refuse to provide your details if you deem a request to be inappropriate. However, you should note that this may impact our ability to provide some services to you if you refuse to provide information that stops us from doing so.

Processing of your personal information will be undertaken in accordance with the Principles of the Data Protection Act 1998. Access to personal information is restricted to authorised individuals on a strictly need to know basis. There may be times when we will share relevant information with third parties for the purposes as outlined above, or where we are legally required to do so. When sharing personal information, we will comply with all aspects of the Data Protection Act.

We are committed to keeping your personal details up to date, and we encourage you to inform us about any changes needed to ensure your details are accurate.

Northampton Partnership Homes  
The Guildhall  
St Giles Square  
Northampton  
NN1 1DE

I give explicit consent to the collection of my Personal and Sensitive Personal Data for the specific purpose of \_\_\_\_\_.

Name\_\_\_\_\_

Address\_\_\_\_\_

Signature\_\_\_\_\_

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# Northampton Partnership Homes



## Privacy Impact Assessment of Data Sharing between NPH and

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Date: \_\_\_\_\_



# Privacy Impact Assessment of Data Sharing

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This Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) defines the arrangements for processing data between Northampton Partnership Homes and \_\_\_\_\_ and it sits underneath the overarching Information Sharing Protocol (ISP) / Partnership Agreement.

1. Parties to the agreement: Full name and address of the organisations or businesses

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2. What information is being shared?

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3. Why is the information being shared?

--

4. What is your legal justification for sharing? Has consent been gained if required?

--

5. How will the information be shared? (e.g. data transfer - include any security measures)

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6. How will the information be stored? (e.g. secure server - include any security measures)

--

7. Who will handle the information – name and job title?

8. How long will the information be kept?

9. How will the information be destroyed?

10. What date will the information be shared? Initial date must be later than the date of the signatures below and should give an indication of subsequent dates for regular sharing.

11. What are the names, roles and contact details of any members of staff who will make sure that the required information is shared at the appropriate time?

12. When will this agreement be reviewed and by whom?

A Data Sharing Agreement (DSA), must be formally approved and signed by both parties before any information sharing takes place. Both parties will ensure that the DSA and any associated documents, are known and understood by all staff involved in the process.

**Originating organisation**

Name of organisation: .....

Name: .....

Position: .....

Signature: ..... Date: .....

**Partner organisation**

Name of organisation: .....

Name: .....

Position: .....

Signature: ..... Date: .....