



Hoarding Policy

Author: Nathan Suley & Andrew Harley

Version 1.0
February 2021

Glossary

Hoarding Disorder	The accumulation of possessions due to excessive acquisition of, or difficulty discarding possessions, regardless of their actual value (The International Classification of Diseases (2018),
Mental Capacity	Mental capacity is about being able to make your own decisions. It is decision and time specific. The Mental Capacity Act 2005 is designed to protect and empower people who may lack the mental capacity to make their own decisions about their care and treatment. It applies to people aged 16 and over.
Self Neglect	“The inability (intentionally or non-intentionally) to maintain a socially and culturally acceptable standard of self-care with the potential for serious consequences to the health and wellbeing of those who self-neglect and perhaps to their community.” Self-neglect covers a wide range of behaviour (including) neglecting to care for one’s personal hygiene, health or surroundings and includes behaviour such as hoarding. Self-Neglect is a type of abuse and neglect as contained within SET (Southend Essex Thurrock) Safeguarding Adults Guidelines. A person who hoards may fall under the definition of an ‘adult at risk’ as per the Care Act 2014. CBH (and Essex County Council) may therefore be subject to associated safeguarding duties as defined by the Act.
Unsanitary Property	A property is considered unsanitary and unacceptable for services or agencies to carry out their duties where it carries a potential health risk to household/neighbours, is detrimental to the property; and/or where it causes a nuisance to neighbours.

Contents

1. Introduction & purpose	4
2. Definitions & characteristics	4
3. Our approach to hoarding	5
4. Mental capacity	6
5. References	7
6. Related documents	7
Document control sheet	8

1. Introduction & purpose

This policy details how Colchester Borough Homes will manage the issue of compulsive hoarding and unsanitary properties within its housing stock.

We recognise that hoarding can present multiple risks and negative impacts for the hoarder, their household, for neighbours and for the wider community. Impacts include unsanitary conditions and the risk of fire. We note that hoarding is present in 25% of domestic fire deaths. There is also an increased likelihood of breaches of conditions of tenancy, evictions, and homelessness.

CBH takes these issues seriously and recognises the damaging impact it can have upon people, including the individual themselves, other householders (both adults and children), other CBH tenants and leaseholders, other residents, and CBH/ CBC staff. We also recognise the disproportionate financial costs related to hoarding over the lifetime of a tenancy, and our responsibility in maintaining the Council's housing stock.

The purpose of the policy is to provide clarity for staff and for customers so that our approach, and customers' expectations, are clearly defined. We will work with partner agencies and organisations (to draw upon external expertise and available resources) to offer effective support to tenants (and members of the household-where appropriate) as early in the process as possible. We will help customers obtain support around related health issues including mental capacity, where relevant.

Our overall objective is for tenants to effectively reduce and control hoarding in order to improve wellbeing and maintain tenancies.

We will take enforcement action as a last resort in order to protect people from ongoing and potential harm (such as that related to fire), and to prevent the deterioration of the housing stock we manage.

2. Definitions & characteristics

Hoarding is distinct from the act of collecting and is also different from people whose property is generally cluttered or messy. It is not simply a lifestyle choice.

The accumulation of possessions results in living spaces becoming cluttered to the point that their use or safety is compromised. The symptoms result in significant distress or significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

Anything can be hoarded, in various areas including the resident's property, garden or communal areas. However, commonly hoarded items include but are not limited to clothes, newspapers, magazines or books, bills, receipts or letters, junk mail, food and empty food containers, animals, medical equipment, collectibles such as toys, videos, DVDs, or CDs, antiques, human excrement, photographs and documents, animals and data.

General characteristics of hoarding include:

- **Fear and anxiety:** Compulsive hoarding may have started as a learnt behaviour or following a significant event such as bereavement. The person hoarding believes buying or saving things will relieve the anxiety and fear they feel. Any attempt to discard hoarded items can induce feelings varying from mild anxiety to a full panic attack with sweats and palpitations.
- **Long term behaviour:** A pattern of collecting and saving may have developed over years or decades.
- **Emotional attachment:** People who hoard may hold an inappropriate emotional attachment to items.
- **Socially isolation:** People who hoard will typically alienate family and friends and may be embarrassed to have visitors and may refuse home visits.
- **Mentally competent:** People who hoard are typically able to make decisions that are not related to the hoarding.
- **Churning:** Hoarding behaviour can involve moving items from one part the property to another, without ever discarding anything.
- **Self-Care:** A person who hoards may appear unkempt and dishevelled, due to lack of toileting or washing facilities in their home.
- **Poor insight:** a person who hoards will typically see nothing wrong with their behaviour and the impact it has on them and others.

Hoarding can amount to “self-neglect” as highlighted in 2014 statutory guidance. This means that CBH may have a duty to raise a safeguarding alert and that Essex Social Care may need to meet the person’s care and support needs under the Care Act 2014.

Hoarding can also be related to specific health needs such as dementia, depression, alcohol and drug misuse, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, learning disability or obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD). However, it is important to remember that not all hoarders have mental health issues.

Hoarding does not favour a particular gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, educational/occupational history, or tenure type.

3. Our approach to hoarding

We recognise that each case is different in terms of the type and extent of items hoarded, the risk, and the reasons behind the hoarding. We want to ensure that issues are dealt with in a supportive, fair, and consistent manner. We will consider individual needs and vulnerabilities and we will employ a flexible approach wherever possible.

We commit resources to ensure the above, which we believe is a cost-efficient response to this issue. We do this by:

- Providing appropriate face to face and/or e-learning training for all staff according to their role.
- Providing detailed procedures (Appendix A) and an Assessment Tool (Appendix B) for front-line staff to provide an objective clutter rating on which our response can be based.
- Ensuring that both specialist 'support' and 'enforcement' strategies are used in an appropriate and co-ordinated manner to help resolve hoarding issues.
- Ensuring that our specialist Tenancy Sustainment Team has the skills and resources to work in partnership with the customer, and with external organisations and agencies as appropriate.
- Arrange professional case conference to ensure adult social care and or mental health services work in partnership to support tenants to take corrective action to sustain their tenancy.
- Where the risk posed to the tenant and/or the wider community is high, we will escalate our concerns to Essex County Adult Social Care
- Where the risk posed to the tenant and/or the wider community is assessed as high to refer case to the Head of Housing Management to consider enforcement action within the ASB, Crime & Policing Act 2014, to reduce any immediate risk.
- Detailing the expected timescales for each stage of action but retaining flexibility in exceptional circumstances on the agreement of a Housing Manager.

4. Mental capacity

Mental capacity is about being able to make your own decisions. It is decision and time specific. We note guidance contained within the SET (Southend Essex Thurrock) Multi-agency Hoarding Protocol:

*When a person's hoarding behaviour poses a serious risk to their health and safety, professional intervention will be required. Except for statutory requirements, any intervention or action proposed must be with the customer's consent. In extreme cases of hoarding behaviour, the very nature of the environment **should** lead professionals to question whether the customer has capacity to consent to the proposed action or intervention and trigger a capacity assessment. This is confirmed by The MCA code of practice which states that one of the reasons why people may question a person's capacity to make a specific decision is "does the person's behaviour or circumstances cause doubt as to whether they have capacity to make a decision." Extreme hoarding behaviour meets this criterion.*

Although lack of mental capacity is not an issue in many cases of hoarding, we note the guidance that the "very nature" of "extreme cases" should cause practitioners (including CBH officers) to "question" capacity. In such cases we will share such concerns with Adult Social Care which may lead to a Mental

Capacity Assessment and /or the appointment of an Independent Mental Health Advocate (IMHA) where appropriate.

5. References

The Care Act 2014 - <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/23/contents/enacted>

This assessment tool in Appendix B is taken from SET (Southend Essex Thurrock) Hoarding Guidance - [hoarding-guidance-2019.pdf \(essexsab.org.uk\)](#)

6. Related documents

[CBH Safeguarding policy](#)

[CBH Safeguarding Procedures](#) (internal document)

[Hoarding Procedure](#) (internal document)

Document control sheet

Title	CBH Hoarding Policy					
File location	https://colchbh.sharepoint.com/sites/fnc/corpdoc/PolDevLib/CBH Hoarding Policy.docx					
Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head of Housing • HR Business Partner (Equality & Safeguarding) • Tenants Task and Finish workshop May 2021 					
Approved	CMT May 2021					
Next review	25/05/2024					
Circulation method	Housing News & Views, CBH website, SharePoint, circulation to senior managers, cascaded to staff via managers.					
Equality Impact Assessment	Required	Yes	Latest	[Latest EqIA (Full)]	Review due	[EqIA Review Due (Full)]
	Completed Link;- <u>Tenancy Audit Policy EQIA Feb 2021 .doc</u>					

Document amendment history

Version	Type	Date	Notes
1.0	New	May 2021	New policy