How to...
tackle hoarding
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What is hoarding?

Many people collect items at some point or even throughout their lives. However, there are a percentage of people for whom collecting becomes an unmanageable pattern of behaviour. Hoarding disorder is a recognised mental health problem. It occurs where a person’s pattern of collecting items becomes excessive and unmanageable, impacting on their daily life and social activities. Approximately 2 to 5 percent of the UK’s adult population may be hoarders.

Compulsive hoarding occurs when:
• a person acquires items excessively
• they are unable to dispose of these items, which may have little meaning or value to others
• the items are stored chaotically and clutter rooms, so they cannot be used effectively for their intended purpose
• this impacts negatively on the person (physically and psychologically)

Hoarding is not the preserve of any group of people and can start at an early age, but collections are likely to grow as people age and so cases are more often seen with older people. Restrictions following illness, accident or that increase with age also contribute to hoarding, by limiting a person’s physical capability to take action.

Hoarding can be exhibited by people who have other issues that might make them vulnerable, for example anxiety, depression or obsessive compulsive disorders, or it can follow on from a traumatic experience.

People who hoard can:
• show an unusual and strong emotional connection with material things
• have difficulty in organising or prioritising items
• experience anxiety or distress at getting rid of items

Not all people who hoard recognise that their behaviour is negative or something that needs to be addressed. Others may be aware of it but be embarrassed and unwilling to ask for help, often feeling overwhelmed by the scale of the hoarding. Housing professionals will need to adapt their approaches to tenants according to the level of awareness the person has of the impact of their hoarding.

Why tackle hoarding?

The impact of hoarding can create significant management problems and requires long term input and support in order to resolve effectively. It is best approached through multi-agency working because of the potential impact for the wider community and other public services. Action is needed to both ensure the safety and wellbeing of the tenant and to secure the long term condition of the home.

Hoarding poses a number of risks:
• it increases the risk of fire in property as the material hoarded is often highly flammable
• it can impede the Fire and Rescue Service particularly when the material blocks doors and windows
• it increases the risk of accident and harm to the tenant and any other household members
• it can compromise the health and safety of neighbours and the wider community. This is especially the case where the tenant occupies a flat and/or where the material hoarded encourages infestations of mice or insects
• it can lead to increased repairs and structural damage to properties (as tenants will often neglect the property, not report repairs or allow access to the property)
• it causes significant costs to the housing provider in terms of management and clearance/repairs to the void property

Recognising the signs of hoarding

In many cases it will be very clear that there is a problem, where rooms are full of items, but the hoarding may initially be confined to certain rooms.

The high risk to wellbeing and life that results from hoarding means that all staff that visit properties, including contractors, should be able to identify the signs of hoarding and know how to raise concerns within the organisation.

Indications include:
• cluttered gardens/sheds
• piles of mail, magazines and other paper material in the property
• overstuffed cupboards
• the property being dirty or in disrepair
• smells coming from rooms
• reluctance of the tenant to allow full access to the property and/or a preference for office-based appointments
• missed access arrangements (for example for gas/other servicing, inspections or arrears interviews)

There are tools that help to identify hoarding and provide an objective assessment of the level of hoarding and risks posed. See for example the Clutter Image Rating score cards
www.helpforhoarders.co.uk

How can housing professionals help people who hoard?

Historically, the reaction to hoarding has been reactive – often contractors were sent in to clear the property without the involvement of or any control by the tenant as to what is removed.

Learning from others

Magenta’s previous approach to tenants who hoarded was often reactive, frequently triggered by complaints from contractors unable to complete work due to the accumulation of material in a person’s home. This would lead to visits from housing management and the removal of the full hoard with limited follow up to ensure the problem did not recur. However, with the introduction of proactive tenancy inspections from 2010, a better sense of the scale of the problem emerged and a pilot was introduced to shape a more effective service including engagement with and provision of support to tenants to tackle their hoarding behaviour.

The pilot led to:
• the development of policies and procedures
• training for all staff
• fire risk assessments being put in place to shape action
• the development of partnerships with other local agencies – including befriending and buddying services that could give additional informed support to tenants, as well as therapeutic support.

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Active intervention to enter a property and make it safe is still likely to be required where the hoarding includes food stuff, waste or animals to a degree that poses a statutory nuisance or health and safety risk. However, taking only an enforcement approach does not directly help the tenant; instead it is likely to exacerbate their anxiety and distress leading to continued and increased hoarding, and a lack of trust and engagement with housing professionals in future.

Housing organisations are increasingly developing a person-centred approach that helps tenants to identify, understand and change unhelpful patterns of thoughts and behaviours that lead to hoarding. This approach helps increase their ability to make decisions about getting rid of items. This is more likely to have a long term beneficial impact for the tenant and help to prevent or reduce hoarding in the future. Although this can be resource intensive, it delivers business benefits by reducing the level of repairs and clearance costs. Orbit’s knowledge transfer project identified that the costs from a reactive approach to hoarding were £13,000 (minimum) per case in 2013. Other recent estimates average £35,000 and above. Ongar, taking an invest to save approach, have invested in a home skills coach specifically to work with people who hoard.

Learning from others

Liverpool Housing Trust (LHT) have designed a toolkit to work alongside practical support and therapeutic services delivered in partnership with Inclusion Matters Liverpool (a provider of talking therapies for the NHS) to support tenants to address hoarding.

Hoarding can often get to such a scale that people are overwhelmed by it and don’t know where to start; LHT’s toolkit separates the home into four general areas, so the person can tackle an area at a time. It uses photographic prompts to help the person and support staff to assess the level of hoarding, and to identify the progress made as the individual works through the process. Working with a series of self assessment score cards, it enables the person to assess their feelings and behaviours as they go through the process, so they can prepare for and manage these as they move onto the next area to clear.

LHT and Inclusion Matters worked on the development of a specialised therapeutic service and manual designed to integrate with the housing support, which runs through ten workshop sessions over a period of twelve weeks. The success of the programme led to two of the residents from the pilot phase establishing a peer mentoring group supported by LHT staff. It meets weekly to give support and encouragement to others and to tackle the social isolation that can accompany hoarding.

The partnership approach with Inclusion Matters and the outcomes delivered for participants, has won the project an award from South Staffordshire and Shropshire Health Trust; LHT was also a finalist in the UK Housing Awards 2015 category of ‘supporting specialist housing needs’. It has also led to the inclusion of LHT on the National Hoarding Advisory Panel to help shape the future treatment and management of hoarding disorder in the UK.

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Mapping local support - statutory and other partners

As the housing provider is the agency with the biggest investment in the property - apart from the tenant - it may be worth looking to build in-house capacity or to partner with other housing providers who may already have experience in tackling hoarding.
Where that is not an option, the housing provider is still likely to be the organisation having most contact with the tenant, including where some enforcement action is required. It is often best placed to map out what services exist locally, and find ways to help tenants access support, whether through their GP or other statutory services such as social care. A multi-agency protocol on hoarding may already exist in the local area, which will set out the roles and responsibilities for all local agencies and provide a framework for sharing information.

Learning from others

In 2011, the **Lewisham Affordable Housing Group** raised awareness of the issues of people hoarding in their homes, and the need for a collaborative approach to tackle the problems. A subgroup drew together a range of agencies to develop a multi-agency hoarding protocol in 2011. The group included housing providers, environmental health, pest control, social care and health, London Fire Brigade and voluntary organisations.

Expert advice from legal, support and therapy organisations helped to shape the protocol, which set out a co-ordinated joint approach, clear roles of participating organisations, and triggers for referrals to safeguarding, the community mental health team or other statutory support.

Visit: [www.cfoa.org.uk/17672](http://www.cfoa.org.uk/17672)

The multi-agency protocol for the **London Borough of Merton** sets out:

- definitions and characteristics of hoarding
- where issues of mental capacity or safeguarding can arise (for children and vulnerable adults)
- the fire risks and statutory measures (environmental health) that come from hoarding
- how to take a multi-agency approach, the roles of each local agency and practical measures such as information sharing
- guidance questions for practitioners to use with people and shared assessment/referral forms to use
- useful information and resources available nationally

Visit: [www.merton.gov.uk/multi_agency_hoarding_protocol_and_practitioner_toolkit_draft_version_april__2014__2_-2.pdf](http://www.merton.gov.uk/multi_agency_hoarding_protocol_and_practitioner_toolkit_draft_version_april__2014__2_-2.pdf) Please contact the LB of Merton to use/reproduce any part of it.

Supporting staff – having clear policies and procedures

Developing clear policies and procedures will give staff the confidence to act when they see signs of hoarding and will embed it as an issue to look for in the course of their work with tenants.

Effective policies and procedures will cover:

- how to identify hoarding behaviour
- how to raise internal alerts
- how to assess risk levels
- lead officers to manage cases
- clear actions and timescales linked to the level of risk
- action/support plans to log progress of tenants in reducing acquisition, and disposing of items
- an escalation process where the tenant refuses to address hoarding/engage with support, including use of injunctions and suspended possession orders etc.
- when and how to alert external statutory agencies - fire and rescue services should be notified of the address of any hoarded property so they are prepared in any case of fire; however, the involvement of other agencies may depend on the level and impact of the problem – for example if it leads to a safeguarding concern
- any local multi agency protocols or information sharing agreements in place
Learning from others

The problem of hoarding was championed by a member of Knightstone Housing’s senior management team who was concerned that, if a member of staff encountered a resident who hoarded, they would not necessarily know how to intervene, meaning that residents might remain at significant risk from fire or other injury.

As a result, a cross departmental team of staff was brought together as an advisory group to:
• share the work of developing policies and procedures
• ensure that the issues for and insight of all staff was utilised, encouraging staff buy-in across all teams and levels
• become champions to provide additional advice and support to staff dealing with hoarders
• cascade the policies and procedures through team meetings to train all staff/contractors

Whilst in development, the policies and procedures were also circulated to local stakeholders such as local authorities and the Fire and Rescue Service. The residents’ involvement strategy group also reviewed the work; it was well received, and this provided the additional benefit of raising awareness and the profile of the issue amongst residents.

In summary:
• the procedures take a risk management approach, with clear timescales for intervention depending upon the level of risk, for example first contact within 48 hours for high risk cases
• there is now a clear escalation process where tenants do not respond to repeated contacts, which includes injunctions to gain access
• the FRS is informed of all hoarding cases so they can be prepared in the case of a fire
• each case is managed by the relevant housing officer, who has responsibility for opening, monitoring and closing cases, but the direct engagement and support to residents is usually provided by the support team, who are trusted to work with the person and achieve progress in a flexible agreed timeframe
• progress is logged to identify milestones, forming part of the monitoring by the housing officer
• cases are not closed until the person has cleared the property and it has remained clutter-free for a year
• the procedures include top tips on how to behave for example, not devaluing the importance of the items, not touching items without their agreement etc.

Knightstone have strengthened their internal expertise by employing a mental health expert. This person will not only be a support to staff, but help the organisation to engage local statutory partners more effectively. Knightstone also draw on the expertise and links from a senior manager’s close engagement with the Local Safeguarding Adults Board.

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Training staff

Specialist and in-depth training to understand and work effectively with people who hoard will be needed for staff that manage the cases and work directly with tenants. However, all staff should be trained to identify the signs of hoarding and to raise alerts and make appropriate internal referrals as part of their normal interaction with tenants and work within properties. This should cover the signs of hoarding, how to talk to people who hoard and how to behave in respect of their collection of material. This will help to gain/retain the willingness of tenants to work to identify and then address their hoarding behaviour.

See CIH training and events to find out about specialist hoarding, safeguarding and other related training: www.cih.org/training
Learning from others

**Orbit Living**’s support service identified a growing number of clients who needed help, or who had already been helped and were being re-referred, alongside rising costs to tackle clear-outs and repairs in properties.

Together with Coventry University, Orbit set up a knowledge transfer partnership that looked at the existing evidence and literature base regarding the effectiveness of intervention to address hoarding, in order to evaluate their own services and shape more effective interventions.

The partnership resulted in a toolkit which provides assessment and intervention tools, including support planning, motivational techniques and resources to tackle relapse. It covers help on multi-agency working and supporting self help groups.

Work with West Midlands Fire Service continued after the knowledge partnership, enabling referrals to be made where a person was identified as having hoarding tendencies. The service then follows up with a home safety check enabling them to install smoke alarms and equipment to reduce the fire risk whilst work is taken on to remove the hoarded collection.

**Visit:** [www.cih.org/news-article/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/news-article/data/How_can_organisations_help_people_with_hoarding_tendencies](http://www.cih.org/news-article/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/news-article/data/How_can_organisations_help_people_with_hoarding_tendencies)

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Homes Fit for Ageing, CIH Health, Wellbeing and Care Conference 2015 - 7-8 October

Hosted by CIH in conjunction with Care and Repair England, this conference sets out to challenge the status quo, explore new ways of thinking and working, looks at a range of housing, and care and support models across all tenures that can support our health and wellbeing as we age. But what about education, employment and training opportunities? Will our pensions provide enough income to support our longevity? Should we be thinking about including these opportunities in planning new housing options?

**Visit:** [www.cih.org/events/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/events/data/Franny/Homes%2520Fit%2520for%2520Ageing](http://www.cih.org/events/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/events/data/Franny/Homes%2520Fit%2520for%2520Ageing)

**Working together to create the next generation of sheltered housing**

Our tenants are getting older, living longer and some have complex health, care and support needs. For decades we have debated the future of sheltered housing. The rise of extra care housing has shifted the spotlight away from sheltered and the contribution it can make to providing homes fit for ageing. We want to work with you to refocus attention on this valuable housing option.

This collaborative project will support you to assess and challenge current practice, identify funding sources, explore and develop new approaches and build sustainable models.

**Visit:** [www.cih.org/shelteredhousing](http://www.cih.org/shelteredhousing)
Useful resources and other information

CIH webinar (CIH member only):
www.cih.org/news-article/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/news-article/data/Webinar_video_Understanding_hoarding_disorder

CIH blogs on hoarding:
www.cih.org/news-article/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/news-article/data/Hoarding_how_can_front_line_housing_staff_help

www.cih.org/news-article/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/news-article/data/How_can_organisations_help_people_with_hoarding_tendencies

CIH How to promote good adult safeguarding practice
www.cih.org/publication-free/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication-free/data/How_to_promote_good_adult_safeguarding_practice

CIH How to communicate with tenants about fire safety
www.cih.org/resources/PDF/Policy%20free%20download%20pdfs/How%20to%20communicate%20with%20tenants%20about%20fire%20safety.pdf

NHF Hoarding: key considerations and best practice
s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/pub.housing.org.uk/Hoarding_briefing_-_August_2015.pdf

CIEH Professional Practice Note: hoarding and how to approach it

SCIE safeguarding guidance on self neglect

SCIE report 46 Self-neglect and adult safeguarding: findings from research
www.scie.org.uk/publications/reports/report46.asp

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