

**HOMES POLICY DEVELOPMENT GROUP
1 OCTOBER 2019**

REVIEW OF HOUSING SERVICE HOARDING POLICY

Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Simon Clist
Responsible Officer: Mrs Claire Fry, Group Manager for Housing Services

Reason for Report: The Housing Service Hoarding Policy requires review by virtue of time bar.

RECOMMENDATION: That the Policy Development Group considers the proposed changes as set out in the tracked policy and that it makes a recommendation to the Cabinet that the changes be adopted.

Financial Implications: Housing management officers are sometimes required to manage cases involving properties that are either cluttered or which are being used to hoard large amounts of possessions, including animals. This can lead to damage to the property. This may also result in rodent or insect infestations, blocked drains and other problems that may also affect neighbouring properties. Rechargeable repairs costs can be inflated if there is damage which can prove at times difficult to recover.

Legal Implications: The Council's tenancy agreement contains clauses relating to hoarding. In particular, it states that tenants must keep their homes clean and tidy and must not allow excessive build up of belongings which could cause a health and safety or fire risk to the tenant, anyone else or to the property. It also states that tenants must ensure that they are able to evacuate the property in the event of a fire or other emergency situation.

Risk Assessment: [start text here and continue without indenting] Hoarding may have serious implications which impact upon health and safety and for this reason the risk it poses is regularly reviewed as part of the risk management framework. Failure to provide housing management staff with policies to use in the course of their day to day activities could result in a less consistent and effective service.

Equality Impact Assessment: The Housing Service recognises that hoarding is classified as a mental health disorder. The Housing Service can ensure a consistent approach which is tailored to meet the needs of the people concerned by ensuring that there is an agreed policy and that staff implement it when responding to issues involving hoarding.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The Council must run the Housing Service efficiently and effectively in accordance with the provisions of the regulatory framework.

Impact on Climate Change: The housing service has actively invested in energy efficiency; extensive use of solar PV and air source heat pumps already exists. The ongoing circa £170M 30 year maintenance programme has a significant focus on ensuring energy efficiency. Where sustainable options are available they are utilised; however, it is acknowledged that where there is a significant cost differential that plays heavily in the choices made.

We recognise that the provision of sustainable communities is important. As part of our commitment to meeting the provisions of the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard within the Regulatory Framework for Social Housing, the Council offers a menu of involvement, which provides opportunities for tenants to get involved in service delivery. Tenants scrutinise the work of the Service and are also involved in the development of our newsletter which is published periodically. We use this and social media to promote sustainability and therefore publish information relating to a variety of topics including fuel efficiency, recycling and healthy living.

Officers sometimes have to respond to emergencies such as those associated those arising from serious incidents of anti-social behaviour. In such cases, safeguarding concerns will take priority in order to minimise risk and it is accepted that the ability to manage such issues effectively may have an environmental impact which would not occur if work can be planned in advance and managed in a more co-ordinated way.

1.0 Introduction/Background

- 1.1 The Council is committed to improving the Housing Service and having an effective Hoarding Policy enables staff to refer to guidance which can be followed when responding to issues which arise when properties are cluttered; or when these properties are being used to hoard large amounts of possessions, including animals.
- 1.2 Hoarding is often described as when someone is unable to dispose of excess or unused things to the point where their belongings are clogging up their living space. Preventive measures must be put in place to reduce health and safety risks to the tenant and others as well to reduce neglect and wilful damage to the property.
- 1.3 This policy identifies the approach of the Housing Service to identifying and dealing with issues of hoarding and clutter in Council properties.
- 1.4 The Tenants Together Group (TT), the Tenant Scrutiny Group, had the review of the Hoarding Policy on the agenda for its meeting on 8 August 2019. The Group asked for more time in which to feedback comments. A verbal update on amendments suggested by the Group will therefore be given at the meeting of the PDG.
- 1.5 Various support agencies were also consulted on the review of the Hoarding Policy and the only response received was from the Manager at the Churches Housing Action Team (CHAT) who confirmed that she and the Tenancy Support Senior Advisor had looked at the draft policy and had no comments.

2.0 Overview of Policy

- 2.1 The existing policy has been in use since it was adopted in 2015. Following a review, it has been agreed that it is fit for purpose and therefore only minor amendments are being suggested. These changes have been included on the policy document contained within Appendix 1 and are shown as tracked changes for ease of reference.

- 2.2 Members will note that the majority of changes to the policy which are being proposed relate to style or grammar. The only major change being proposed is insertion of a reference to the Vulnerability Policy adopted for use by the Housing Service. This policy was adopted in 2017 and sets out the approach of the Housing Service to those who may not be able to look after their home and who may be in need of additional support.
- 2.3 It is recognised that hoarding/clutter can become a significant health and safety risk to the tenant, their household and any visitors to their property or neighbouring properties, which cannot be ignored.
- 2.4 Hoarding/clutter can generate complaints of anti-social behaviour such as untidy gardens, unpleasant odours from the property and infestation of vermin. These will be dealt with in line with the Housing Services Anti-social behaviour policy.
- 2.5 The policy acknowledges that it is common that when any issues of hoarding are brought to the landlord's attention, it is likely to be severe, resulting in breaches of the tenancy agreement. Staff will work with the tenant to reduce issues raised and address any health and safety concerns or breaches of the tenancy agreement.
- 2.6 Reference is made to the tenancy agreement, highlighting that tenants are responsible for the behaviour of their household and that they are required to comply with the terms and conditions.
- 2.7 The policy raises awareness of the Housing Services Recharge Policy which makes reference to any costs incurred due to neglect or wilful damage, stating that they will be recharged to the tenant.
- 2.8 Staff will carry out tenancy home checks, in the first instance, unannounced. These visits will identify any issues with hoarding/clutter at the property or if access routes for emergency services have been jeopardised.
- 2.9 Although animal hoarding is more uncommon, any cases will be brought to the attention of the RSPCA and any other relevant agencies, for further advice and assistance, to ensure that the welfare of any animals have been met.
- 2.10 It is recognised that there may be many reasons why a property has either become cluttered or why large volumes of items have been hoarded at the property. These may include mental health issues or be due to bereavement or shock. Therefore, Officers will work in partnership with other agencies to reduce any issues raised and to ultimately improve the quality of life for the tenant and their household.
- 2.11 In extreme cases, it may be necessary for the Housing Service to take tenancy enforcement action. Officers will use a variety of the tools and powers available to them to address any tenancy breaches, to fulfil any legal obligations or to take action where it has been identified that there is a health and safety risk which could have a detrimental effect on the tenant, members of their household and visitors or the property.

2.12 It has been suggested that the next review of the policy should take place in ten years and this amendment has been suggested as a tracked change in the updated draft of the policy.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

3.1 Members are asked to consider the content and the proposed changes; and to agree a recommendation relating to the adoption of the revised policy to the Cabinet. In the meantime, the policy will be reviewed and revised to reflect any legislative requirements and/ or other guidance or good practice.

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Circulation of the Report: Councillor Simon Clist, Cabinet Member for Housing, Leadership Team

List of Background Papers: None