

1. Background and objectives

- 1.1. Hoarding is a highly complex mental health condition and form of behaviour, requiring a co-ordinated and collaborative multi-agency approach to facilitate positive and sustainable changes and outcomes for both customers and housing management services.

In 2021, the NHS reported a 25% increase in hoarding case referrals to mental health services compared to pre-pandemic levels. It is reported that one in four domestic fire related deaths can be linked to hoarding.

This policy details how Alliance Homes will manage the significant and resource-intensive issues created by hoarding behaviour, which is prevalent in approximately 1-2% of our housing stock. These issues include:

- Impact on the wellbeing of household members, neighbours, and visitors to the property.
- Health and Safety: unsafe and unhealthy living conditions and fire risk.
- Damage and deterioration of the property's structure due to excessive weight.
- Condensation, mould and damp build-up due to restricted airflow or lack of heating.
- Inability to carry out essential repairs and maintenance due to areas being inaccessible or unsanitary.

2. Policy detail

Scope and Definitions

- 2.1. This document should be used by all employees, and contractors of Alliance Homes to understand the statutory obligations placed upon the business to maintain a safe environment for customers and their households, employees, others visiting the property and households living close to the property. It will also outline our management approach to complex hoarding cases. There is an expectation that to achieve the best outcome for our customers all employees will act collaboratively and engage fully both internally between teams and with partnership agencies.
- 2.2. We recognise hoarding as a disorder or pattern of behaviour in which the individual excessively acquires and fails to discard any materials to the point that it impedes their day-to-day living and it creates a hazard, or a potential hazard, for the individual or causes a nuisance or hazard to others. Hoarded items can be inanimate objects or animals.

Procedure

- 2.3. In all cases employees will follow the Hoarding Case Management Procedure, ensuring accountability, consistency, efficient decision making, and safety and risk management.

It will also make clear that a transparent communication framework is in place both with the customer and within the business and that all communications and interactions are recorded. These records are essential should Alliance Homes seek to take enforcement or court action and for providing operational continuity where cases may be managed by different staff over time.

Identification and intervention

- 2.4. Any member of staff who has concerns that a customer may be hoarding, should report this to ACT or through Raise a Concern protocols within 1 working day.
- 2.5. External contractors should raise concerns with their Alliance Homes contract manager who will then report the potential problem.
Other situations where hoarding behaviour may be identified include:
 - Complaints or concerns registered by a 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
- 2.6. Alliance Homes is committed to identifying potential hoarding problems at the earliest possible opportunity and making positive intervention, to reduce risk and support our customers to sustain their conditions of tenancy or lease.
- 2.7. We recognise that the nature and causes of hoarding are complex and that each case will be different. We will take a person-centred approach to managing all cases and will whenever possible, work with the customer to find actions and solutions that take their needs and circumstances into account.
- 2.8. It should be assumed in the first instance that everyone has capacity to make decisions even if those decisions seem unwise or unhealthy to others. Where someone is judged as not having capacity to make an informed decision about their own wellbeing, these will be made in their best interest on their behalf. Any such decisions will be made in accordance with the requirements of the Mental Capacity Act 2005, and in liaison with the necessary statutory services and agencies.
- 2.9. We take all reports of hoarding seriously and our Tenancy Officers (enforcing tenancy conditions) or Leasehold Team (enforcing conditions of lease) will act as case managers from receipt of the concern or complaint referred to them, co-ordinating both investigation and response.
- 2.10. To determine the action that needs to be taken we will use health and safety risk assessments designed to identify hazards in the home and the effect that each may have on the health and safety of customers and their households. In conjunction with these risk assessments, we will use nationally recognised clutter scale ratings which provide an objective visual framework to assess the severity of hoarding or disorganisation in living spaces.

- 2.11. The risk assessment will be used by Tenancy or Leasehold Officers to differentiate between welfare concerns (which may include hoarding tendencies) and clear hoarding behaviour. Welfare issues may include poor living standards often linked to temporary or poor hygiene, learned behaviour, too many belongings for the space available or customers being unable to care for themselves or their home adequately due to immobility or disability. Such cases present a negligible or lower risk of harm but still require that advice is given or warnings issued on meeting tenancy or lease conditions, referrals to support services or referrals to obtain support from domiciliary care services.
- 2.12. Where it is evaluated that the behaviour of the customer together with the clutter rating and any associated health and safety concerns indicate a hoarding disorder, the case will be logged as a Hoarding Concern on customer case files. This will help give the case focus and alert all colleagues to its status. If it is determined that it is not hoarding but nevertheless a concern it will be logged as a Welfare Concern, with commensurate action taken.
- 2.13. Tenancy and Leasehold services will work closely with colleagues on the Safer Homes Team to facilitate access. The Safer Homes team have a statutory, regulatory and contractual duty to ensure our properties are safe and free from serious hazards. They will use the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) to evaluate health and safety risks. Where hoarding behaviour has been identified it is likely that hazards will range from a moderate risk with potential for worsening conditions if not tackled to high or excessive risks of harm (classified as Category 1 hazards under HHSRS) requiring urgent remedial action or repair work.
- 2.14. Common Category 1 hazards associated with hoarding are:
- Significant risk of fire
 - Structural collapse
 - Insecure homes
 - Pests and infestations
 - Inadequate or no heating
 - Mould and damp
 - Trip hazards causing falls
 - Electrical hazards
- 2.15. We report all high and excessive risk hoarding cases to relevant specialist support agencies (such as the fire service, social services, community mental health teams, community safety forums) to help us support customers to manage and ultimately remove the risks posed by their hoarding. Where appropriate we take a multi-agency approach to support hoarders to sustain their tenancy by participating in, and where necessary setting up, professionals meetings held by local authorities. In practice meetings are most often raised by social services who invite key professionals who have an interest in the case, often from multiple perspectives.
- 2.16. We immediately notify the relevant authorities where we identify any safeguarding issues, such as self-neglect or where children and young people are at risk.

2.17. Tenancy Officers, together with the fire service in most cases, will engage with customers and together produce action plans which typically will consist of a phased and targeted approach. The most serious hazards will be tackled first and customers will be instructed to remove items within a specific timeframe to enable:

- Free movement from one room to another
- Unimpeded access to and exit from the property
- Doors to close to individual rooms

Assistance and advice will be provided to ensure:

- Security doors are functioning and able to close
- Flammable materials are removed from heat sources
- Overloaded sockets and electrical leads are reduced or eliminated
- Utility shut offs are accessible
- Smoke alarms are clear from clutter and working
- Materials used for smoking are managed and risks reduced

2.18. Once the most serious hazards have been removed or reduced, customers will be encouraged to remove and clear items in phases until clutter and hygiene levels reach acceptable levels.

2.19. We will monitor the condition of the property at regular intervals using a structured distancing of intervention and visits from the case manager (in conjunction with supporting partner agencies). This is likely to help the customer to independently manage their behaviour. The distancing of intervention should involve clear timescales that are agreed with the customer.

Support

2.20. Where family or friends are already involved, and willing to co-operate, we will encourage their assistance.

2.21. Where the customer that is hoarding is already engaged with a support service, we will try to work alongside this existing arrangement.

2.22. With the consent of the customer Tenancy Officers will make referrals to the fire service to arrange home fire safety checks, and to support and tenancy sustainability support services where appropriate.

2.23. Tenancy Officers may refer protracted hoarding cases internally to a Tenancy Officer specialising solely in Hoarding management and support. They will offer more intensive support and liaise with partnership agencies accordingly.

2.24. We will not generally engage in the wholesale clearance of hoarded items as this practice is detrimental to the mental health of the hoarder, erodes trust and our ability to maintain a positive relationship with the customer. However, there may be situations where the

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hoarding is excessive and the hazards so serious (affecting building structure or health) that Alliance Homes will have to remove items or conduct cleaning to meet acceptable levels of safety. We reserve the right to recharge customers the costs of this action.

2.25. Where appropriate arrangements have been made with the customer, our Community Enforcement Officers may, on an impromptu basis, collect and dispose of items to help with the customer's efforts to make room to work within.

Enforcement

2.26. We will consider a range of options – including tenancy enforcement – against a customer where they refuse to engage with instruction or offers of support and where:

- A customer does not provide access for essential health and safety checks such as for gas and electricity safety.
- A customer does not provide prompt access for Tenancy Officers, operatives or the Safer Homes Team to carry out inspections or any required repairs or maintenance.
- The condition of the property makes it practically impossible or presents a significant health and safety risk for work to be carried out by a member of staff or contractor.
- We are required to respond to a statutory Environmental Health notice.
- The health and safety of the customer or others is at risk.
- The customer has initially engaged and given access or may have started to de-clutter as part of an action plan but progressively disengages from support or stops taking action to the point where they fail to meet targeted health and safety measures, and as a result put themselves and those around them at risk for longer than is acceptable.

2.27. We will continue to offer assistance and support to a customer, even after we begin enforcement action, as we recognise that a customer may change their perspective of the situation at any point.

2.28. We will work to consider legal action only as a last resort or where there are sufficient risks. If we feel that it is appropriate, it will be where all other avenues have been exhausted and where the customer has not sufficiently engaged with Tenancy Officers and/or with offers of support.

2.29. We may recharge the customer where we de-clutter and deep clean a property, for any repairs caused by hoarding behaviour or court costs incurred.

3 Monitoring, consultation, and review

The Board and our regulator will receive reports on the performance against agreed targets and indicators.

In line with our involvement, customers, staff, and stakeholders will be included in:

- Monitoring our performance
- Reviewing this policy, to reflect their needs and priorities

Further details about how this will be achieved are set out in separate tenant and leaseholder involvement agreements.

The Service Delivery Manager - Neighbourhoods is responsible for the implementation of this policy.

This policy will be reviewed within two years of its approval by The Service Delivery Manager – Neighbourhoods and will be approved by our Executive Team.

This policy will be signed off by the Strategic Leadership Team.

This policy will be published externally on the Alliance Homes website.

4 Equality and diversity

This policy is subject to a periodic Equality Impact Assessment (EIA).

The purpose of such an assessment is to consider the effect of the policy regarding the recognised protected characteristics of equality and ensure that it does not unfairly impact any individual or group. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity or other grounds set out in our Equality and Diversity Strategy and Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy. Remedial action will be undertaken if a detrimental effect is identified.

The EIA also requires the policy author to consider whether the policy is likely to negatively impact on a person's Human Rights.

This policy and any other related Alliance Homes publications can be provided in other formats for those with visual, literacy or language difficulties.

5 Complaints (remove if not external)

If you would like to raise a complaint in relation to this policy, you can do this by calling us on calling us on **03000 120 120** or emailing us at **act@alliancehomes.org.uk**.

All complaints will be handled in line with the latest Alliance Homes Complaint Handling Policy.

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6 Associated documents

- Hoarding Case Management Procedure
- Clutter Image Rating
- Tenancy Agreement
- Tenancy Management Policy
- Reasonable Adjustments Policy
- Fire Safety Policy
- Fire Risk Assessment Policy
- Home Safety – National Fire Chiefs Council
- Electrical Safety Policy
- Repairs, Maintenance & Improvements Policy

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7 Version control and approval dates

Approval stage	Date completed
Equality Impact Assessment completed	04/02/2026
EIA reviewed by HR specialist in EDI	09/02/2026
SLT approval	13/03/2026
Next review date	March 2028

8 Appendices

Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 2 - Information on Hoarding Disorder

Appendix 1: Equality Impact Assessment

An Equalities Impact Assessment must be conducted alongside the review of an existing policy or the creation of a new one.

1. Name the Strategy, Policy, Procedure or Function (SPPF) being assessed and name of author.

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2. Aims of the SPPF being assessed.

- *Whose need is it designed to meet?*
- *Are there any measurable elements such as time limits or age limits?*

The policy seeks to provide a structured, supportive and safe approach to managing cases of hoarding. The primary objectives are to balance the welfare of the individual who hoards with the safety of their household, neighbours and visitors whilst meeting our statutory duties regarding the repair and maintenance of the property. The reduction of primary health and safety risks using risk assessment tools is of foremost concern. These include fire hazards, structural damage and trip hazards. It seeks also to mitigate risks associated with vermin, infestation, mould and damp and unhygienic living conditions. The statutory requirement to address Category 1 hazards under the Housing & Safety Rating System (HHSRS) in a timely manner puts pressure on a complex situation. Engaging with and supporting individuals using a non-judgmental, person-centred and trauma informed approach is essential in communicating the health and safety risks, time constraints and tenancy sustainability issues together with the formulation of action plans to de-clutter. As hoarding cases are complex the policy seeks to outline the benefits of a unified and collaborative response between Alliance Homes and partner agencies such as social services, mental health and fire services.

3. Who has been consulted in developing the SPPF?

- *Make reference or links to consultation/evidence documents*

Through shared experiences Neighbourhood managers and Tenancy Officers have had primary input together with colleagues in Support, Assets and Sustainability and Repairs teams. External agencies have been consulted widely including social services, safeguarding and fire services and local authority safeguarding teams. Customer attending future hoarding support groups will provide

4. Does the SPPF promote equality of opportunity?

Yes, the policy ensures that our customers and particularly those with mental health conditions or disabilities associated with hoarding disorder are not unfairly discriminated against through judgmental behaviour or the prioritisation of tenancy enforcement and statutory health and safety requirements above a tailored and consistent support approach mandating reasonable adjustments and seeking resolutions to complex issues in collaboration with multiple health and safety agencies.

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5. Identify potential impact on each of the diversity “groups” by considering the following questions (the list is not exhaustive but an indication of the sort of questions assessors should think about):

- Might some groups find it harder to access the service?
- Do some groups have particular needs that are not well met by the current SPPF?
- What evidence do you have for your judgement (e.g. monitoring data, information from consultation/research/feedback)?
- Have staff/residents raised concerns/complaints?
- Is there local or national research to suggest there could be a problem?

Protected Characteristic	No impact	Negative	Positive	Information source/s **	Comments/evidence
Race	X				No evidence to suggest that religion, belief or culture is a factor.
Disability			X		<p>Hoarding disorder is a recognised disability/mental health condition. A person-centred approach will be taken focusing on support but balancing the individual’s needs with the duty of care to themselves and potentially on neighbouring or other vulnerable customers.</p> <p>Plain English and respectful language will be used in all communications. Accessible formats will be used where requested, such as large print, braille or language translation services. A verbal explanation of written communication is required in all cases due to the tenancy being at high risk.</p>
Gender	X				No evidence to suggest that gender is a factor.
Transgender	X				No evidence to suggest that transgender issues are a factor.

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<i>Sexual orientation</i>	X				No evidence to suggest that sexual orientation is a factor.
<i>Religion or belief</i>	X				No evidence to suggest that religion, or belief or culture is a factor
<i>Age</i>			X		<p>Cognitive decline associated with aging can exacerbate hoarding behaviour. Hoarding is 4x more prevalent and severe among elderly people compared to younger adults.</p> <p>Plain English and respectful language will be used in all communications. Accessible formats will be used where requested, such as large print, braille or language translation services. A verbal explanation of written communication is required in all cases due to the tenancy being at high risk.</p> <p>Safety protocols are standardised but should prioritise removal of trip and fire hazards.</p>
<i>Marriage & Civil Partnership</i>	X				No evidence to suggest that marriage or civil partnership is a factor
<i>Pregnancy and Maternity</i>			X		Trip hazards and hygiene issues may have greater health impact on pregnancy. Perinatal and antenatal mental health issues may intersect with hoarding behaviours. Access to specialist support services such as the Health Visitor Service will reduce risk.
<i>Rural issues</i>	X				No evidence to suggest that rural issues are a factor
<i>Social mobility</i>	X				No evidence to suggest that social mobility is a factor

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Was there a negative impact identified in question 5? If yes go to question 6. if not go to question 7.

6. If “negative impact” identified in table (4) above is it?

Legal -

What is the level of impact? -

YES	NO
HIGH	LOW

If it is not legal and/or high impact – (i.e.: if you have highlighted NO to legal and HIGH to impact, then the document should be referred to Head of HR)

7. If positive impact has been identified in table 4 above, how can it be improved upon or maximised, either in this SPPF or others?

Regular training and knowledge sharing workshops both internally and together with partnership agencies. The intended development of hoarding support groups to gain the perspective of customers experiencing hoarding to inform how we approach the management of these complex cases. Also, the development with partner agencies of a hoarding board to pool resource, manage and prioritise complex hoarding cases and resolutions, where local authorities, multiple agencies and professionals have input from their perspective.

8. Full EIA (or if you decide full EIA is not necessary but some changes should be considered)

- Are there changes you could introduce which would make this SPPF work better for this group of people?
- Is further research or consultation required?

9. Does this proposal have any potential Human Rights implications?

If yes, please describe (if necessary, please refer to the Alliance Homes Group Human Rights Policy)

This policy supports our approach to Human Rights which is detailed in our Human Rights Policy

Appendix 2 Information on Hoarding

Hoarding disorder is now recognised as a specific and distinct mental health problem having been previously thought of as a variant of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). It is characterized by persistent difficulties discarding possessions, leading to the accumulation of clutter that substantially restricts the use of active living areas, and associated clinically significant distress or functional impairment.

People suffering with hoarding disorder are often stigmatised and marginalised and may have become isolated from others. Frequently it is associated with other physical and mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety and trauma from loss or bereavement. It is estimated that between 2 – 5 % of the UK population are affected by the disorder with similar incidence in males and females.

Hoarding is widely considered the number one fire risk in the UK as the accumulation of clutter significantly increases the chance of a fire starting and makes it extremely difficult to escape safely due to blocked exits and rapidly spreading flames.

As a mental health problem, it is twice as common as OCD and four times as prevalent as Bipolar Affective Disorder or Schizophrenia. Onset can start in adolescence, although interference in daily functioning is usually seen by mid 30s, with most sufferers not seeking help until their 50s. Onset is likely to be earlier in women. The best available treatment we have for hoarding currently is disorder specific Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) but resource in this area is extremely limited.

Resources

www.hoardinguk.org

www.mind.org.uk

www.nhs.uk

www.rcpsych.ac.uk