Condition of Property and Hoarding Policy

platform housing group

Scope of Policy

This policy sets out Platform Housing Group's (the Group) response to cases of hoarding and general concerns surrounding the condition of property in our homes.

Applicability

The policy applies to all members of the Group.

1. Policy Statement

1.1 It is our aim to identify and support customers who display signs of hoarding or where the condition of their home or garden has deteriorated through neglect, waste or default of the property, differentiating between the two.

Where signs of hoarding or deterioration of the property are identified, we will attempt to contact the customer and engage with them to resolve the issue, seeking third party support from partner agencies where appropriate.

We will attempt to identify any vulnerabilities or mental/physical disabilities the customer may suffer from and, if relevant, will seek to manage the process with regard to those vulnerabilities/disabilities in a fair and transparent manner.

2. Context

2.1 It is recognised that condition of property cases (including garden) are often a result of someone's difficulty to look after themselves and/or their property and therefore allow their home to become untidy or dirty. This may be due to a lack of basic skills, mental or physical disability or some other circumstance which is beyond their control. However, in some cases, customers may simply have disregard for taking responsibility for cleaning and caring for their home.

2.2 We also recognise that condition of property concerns may also centre around hoarding. Hoarding can be described as the persistent collecting of goods, objects or animals and being unable to discard of such possessions when the quantity has become excessive. Hoarding can vary in extent, with severe cases potentially affecting a customer's ability to function on a day-to-day basis.

Hoarding is a recognised mental health condition and is referred to by the NHS as "Hoarding Disorder". Hoarding disorder is often challenging to treat, because many people who hoard do not see it as a problem or have little awareness of the impact it may have.

It is acknowledged that compulsive hoarding is highly complex and we will attempt to work in a collaborative and integrated way, seeking to engage relevant third parties in a co-ordinated multi-agency approach to effectively support customers who hoard.

2.3 Property condition can affect:

- The health and safety of our customers, household occupants and visitors in their homes including members of the emergency services and our employees, agents and contractors who need to attend the property.
- The health and safety of their neighbours or adjacent properties.
- The ability and steps needed to be taken by the Group in ensuring it meets its building safety compliance obligations.
- The condition and value of the properties that the Group own and rent.
- The ability for the Group to maintain its homes.

Where a property is not maintained or is difficult to clean further to hoarding, living conditions can become unhygienic, malodourous and can lead to rodent or insect infestations, blocked drains and other problems that may affect the property and neighbouring properties. Excessive clutter can also introduce potential fire risk into the property and make it difficult to escape in an emergency.

2.4 The Group is likely to become aware of property condition cases:

- During routine and/or planned maintenance works required at the property.
- When complaints of anti-social behaviour are received; for example, those concerning the presence of vermin or clutter in outside spaces.
- When reports of welfare concerns from family members, anonymous, external services or neighbours are received.
- When we are unable to gain access for routine inspection i.e., gas service or where the customer may be identified as being 'silent', or through a Tenancy Health Check.

3. Aims and Objectives

3.1 The Group is committed to ensuring our homes and communities are clean and safe. Through early identification and robust case management, we will attempt to support our customers in managing their homes and ensuring their safety and the safety of those living in neighbouring properties. Where appropriate, we will endeavour to work in partnership with other agencies to effectively respond to concerns and cases of property condition.

4. Policy Outline

4.1 Leadership & Strategic Commitment

The Group recognises the risk and impact condition of property cases including hoarding may have on a property and neighbours. It acknowledges that it can put the customer, household members as well as neighbours' lives at serious risk. The Group's staff agents and contractors may also be placed at risk when attending the property for checks, inspections or to carry out repairs.

4.2 Principles

In managing cases of property condition we will endeavour to:

- Ensure colleagues are provided with training and support to effectively identify and respond to condition of property cases, including hoarding.
- Ensure customers are made aware of the terms and conditions of their tenancy agreement and of their responsibilities in relation to maintaining their home.
- Ensure the reporting of condition of property cases is accessible and easy, considering customers' needs and eliminating any barriers.
- Ensure that all information is written, as far as possible, in plain English and will provide communication to customers in other formats and languages where required.
- Treat people fairly and sensitively during our investigations.
- Work in partnership with our partner agencies to support customers, signposting customers where appropriate.
- Work closely with the Fire Service and other agencies such as Adult Social Care to identify cases of hoarding and compulsive behaviour disorders, and any other relevant property condition case.
- Ensure any information provided to us is treated in the strictest of confidence subject to our ability to disclose information to relevant third parties in accordance with data protection law (for example in cases of child protection or the prevention of crime).
- Ensure a robust approach towards condition of property cases including hoarding and compulsive behaviour disorder and that all case notes are captured on our case management system.
- Enforce tenancy and lease conditions, using effective and prompt case management interventions with a balance of prevention and support measures and, where appropriate, the use of early interventions and legal remedies, where reasonable and proportionate.
- Raise awareness of hoarding and compulsive behaviour disorder.
- Monitor our performance to assess the quality of our service and compliance with this policy and the condition of property procedure.

4.3 Managing Condition of Property Cases

4.3.1 Responding to Reports of Property Condition Concerns

A visit will be completed within 20 working days or within 5 working days where we have been notified of a health and safety hazard. At the visit, the Officer will assess the condition of the property and complete an inspection form. We will attempt to agree a clear action plan with consideration being given to any vulnerabilities of the customer or household member or support needs.

Where there is evidence of toxic or flammable liquids or gases kept in the home, the Officer will ask the customer to remove these immediately.

4.3.2 **Case Management**

Case management of condition of property cases is outlined within the Condition of Property Procedure. The procedure outlines the importance of ensuring SMART objectives for customers to work towards, ensuring that tasks are achievable and not overwhelming, but acknowledging the importance of ensuring prompt improvements to the condition of the property.

Where hoarding is identified, the “Clutter Matrix” will be used and the frequency of follow up visits will be identified dependent on the extent of the hoarding.

Consideration will be given to the requirement to complete a Person Centred Fire Risk Assessment (PCFRA) during the course of the investigation and management of a case.

Where there is evidence of self-neglect, or the risk of neglect to others, a referral will be made in line with the Group’s Safeguarding policy and procedure.

Cases will remain open and under review until all outstanding actions agreed as part of the action plan or subsequent reviews have been completed.

4.3.3 **Partnership Working**

The Group recognises the importance of working with partner agencies to reduce hoarding and compulsive behaviour and to improve the condition of properties.

The Group will attempt to work with a range of services such as social care, Community Mental Health Services, Fire Service, Environmental Health and any other relevant agency as required.

Information sharing across all relevant agencies (subject to data protection principles), is crucial to ensure that all agencies involved have a better understanding of the extent and impact of the property condition to allow a co-ordinated approach to supporting the individual and assist them in reducing the impact on their own wellbeing and that of others. The Group will attend and/or arrange multi-agency meetings to encourage the sharing of information in complex cases, to allow the risk to be appropriately managed.

4.3.4 **Information Sharing and Confidentiality**

Information provided to us in respect of condition of property will always be treated as confidential and will not normally be used or shared for any other purpose without the consent of the person providing it. There are, however, exceptions to this principle, such as in cases of safeguarding. Where this is the case, a clear rationale for the sharing of the information will be recorded.

4.3.5 **Value for Money**

The Group will ensure that it understands the costs associated with managing condition of property cases so there is a strong focus in achieving value for money for our customers.

This will be achieved by:

- Ensuring that early intervention tools are used, where possible and appropriate, prior to undertaking enforcement action.
- Considering which tool is most likely to be effective, reasonable, proportionate and necessary when enforcement action is considered.
- Completing enforcement action 'in house', through the Community Safety team, wherever possible.
- Regularly reviewing cost of instructed solicitors, ensuring costs are reflective of the work being completed noting the likely complexity where customers are disabled and vulnerable.

4.3.6 **Safeguarding**

The Group will consider the wellbeing and safety of children and vulnerable adults. All those involved in the delivery of this policy should ensure that they are familiar with the Group's Safeguarding Children, Young People and Adults at Risk Policy.

4.3.7 **Training**

Appropriate training will be given to colleagues to raise their awareness and to equip them to implement this policy and its related procedures effectively.

5. Equality and Diversity

5.1 The Group is committed to fairness and equality for all regardless of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation as referred to in our relevant Group policies. Our aim is to ensure that our policies and procedures comply with our legal duties and do not unlawfully discriminate, either directly or indirectly, and adjustments which are reasonable, in law, may be made to the policy to where required.

5.2 Impact assessments have been undertaken in respect of this policy and which identified no negative impacts on any person/group with a protected characteristic.

6. Complaints

6.1 We aim to meet the needs of our customers by providing an excellent service. However, it is acknowledged that occasionally things go wrong and customers may wish to complain. Should the need arise to make a complaint, please refer to our Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy.

7. Monitoring and Review

7.1 Key performance information will be provided to the Senior Leadership Team which will determine the effectiveness of this policy.

7.2 This policy will be reviewed every three years or on the introduction of new legislation, best practice guidelines or operational changes, whichever is sooner.

7.3 We may update this policy from time to time to reflect changes in the law, regulations, or how we operate.

7.4 Approved documents are valid for use after their approval date and remain in force beyond any expiry of their review date until an updated version is available.

8. Associated Documents

8.1 List of documents - associated policies, procedures and publications:

- Safeguarding Policies (Adults and Children)
- Data Protection Policy
- Complaints, Comments and Compliments Policy
- The Tenancy Agreement
- Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014
- Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003
- Equality Act 2010
- Housing Acts 1985, 1986 and 1998
- Modern Slavery Act 2015
- Children Act 2004
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Police and Justice Act 2006
- Homeless Reduction Act 2017
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Mental Health Act 1983
- Neighbourhood and Community Standard
- Tenancy Standard

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