BELGRAVE NEIGHBOURHOOD CO-OPERATIVE HOUSING ASSOCIATION HOARDING POLICY

Aims of the hoarding policy

The following are aims of the hoarding policy:

- to ensure that hoarding cases are identified and the levels of risk identified
- to ensure that support is offered to members where the level of risk from hoarding requires change
- to take appropriate actions in each case, ensuring that appropriate agencies are informed in severe cases

Delegated Authority

1 The co-op delegates responsibility for the co-op's hoarding policy to the Senior Housing Lead, acting in conjunction with the Senior Property and Compliance Manager and Chief Executive Officer on any significant actions needed in relation to the policy.

Introduction

2 Hoarding is the persistent collecting of goods, objects or animals and being unable to discard such possessions when the quantity has become excessive.

3 Hoarding can vary from mild to severe cases whereby it may not impact on a person's life at all, or it could seriously affect their functioning on a day to day basis.

4 Those who hoard may consider the items they hoard to be important to them and they may not perceive that any problems are caused by their hoarding (and in less severe cases there may be no problems).

5 Those who hoard may also function quite normally within society and may have no mental health condition.

6 A difficult balance may need to be struck between respecting a member's autonomy and the co-op having a duty of care to the

member, other residents and their neighbours. Balancing choice, control, independence and wellbeing calls for sensitive and carefully thought through decision-making. It is important to understand each member's situation and, wherever possible, to try and find a way of working effectively with them. Both the Care Act and Making Safeguarding Personal emphasise the importance of trying to involve the person in decision making and, wherever possible, focusing on the outcomes that the person wants to achieve.

Definition of hoarding

7 Hoarding is recognised as a distinct mental health issue and is referred to by the NHS as "Hoarding Disorder". A hoarding disorder can be challenging to treat, because many people who hoard frequently do not see it as a problem or have little awareness of how it impacts on their life or lives of others. It can affect:

- the health and safety of members in their homes
- the co-op's ability of the co-op to meet its building safety and repairs obligations
- the health and safety of neighbours
- the condition of properties owned by the co-op and potentially adjacent properties.

8 The NHS defines hoarding disorder as "where someone acquires an excessive number of items and stores them in a chaotic manner, usually resulting in unmanageable amounts of clutter. The items can be of little or no monetary value."

9 The Fire Service regards hoarders as being at higher risk in the event of a fire, due to an increased likelihood of fire starting and/or causing an injury or fatality. The Fire Service's definition of hoarding is:

- collecting or keeping large amounts of various items in the home due to strong urges to save them or distress experienced when discarding them
- many rooms in the home are so filled with possessions that the person can no longer use the rooms as designed
- the home is so overloaded with things that everyday living is compromised.

10 Hoarding as a clinical symptom can occur in many different diagnosed disorders, such as dementia, schizophrenia, depression, learning disability, eating and personality disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder. The two conditions in which hoarding is most likely to occur are elderly self-neglect (or 'Diogenes Syndrome) and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) which is a form of anxiety disorder characterised by either obsessions (recurring thoughts or images that causes distress) or compulsions (repetitive behaviour or mental acts that the person is driven to perform to reduce stress or avoid a feared situation), or possibly both.

11 The following are the different types of hoarder:

- general hoarder, who can hoard anything
- ordinary hoarder, who mainly hoards objects
- specialist hoarder, who saves one or more specific categories of items
- Diogenes' Syndrome, also known as senile squalor. Extreme self-neglect, domestic squalor, social withdrawal, compulsive hoarding of rubbish and lack of shame
- Diogenes' Syndrome 'by proxy', where hoarding has led to the neglect of another elderly person sharing the same accommodation. This is an example of (unintentional) elder abuse
- animal hoarder, who hoards more animals than they can properly care for
- scarcity mentality hoarder, 'What if the depression returns'
- frugality indecision hoarder, who believes that nothing should be wasted
- frozen indecision hoarder, who finds no decision easy

12 There are many other causes. Hoarding could also be caused if the customer has a disability and is physically unable to clear things out, by downsizing (possibly as a result of welfare reform) or through family influences.

13 Animal hoarding is a complex issue and one that is not improved by simply removing the animals, because acquisition of more animals will often occur. The behaviour has significant effects on the individual concerned, their family, the animals and neighbours with huge costs to services.

14 Hoarding can produce the following risks:

- serious health risks for the member
- removal of family members if a court considers them to be at risk
- homelessness for the member if their actions are a breach of tenancy
- falls or accidents and the inability of emergency personnel to enter and remove an ill person
- clutter and rubbish resulting in mould or infestation which can cause respiratory and other health problems
- blocked exits or vents posing a fire hazard and potentially a structural hazard dependent on the weight of items
- hoarding of dangerous or flammable items may cause fire and other safety hazards.

15 It is also important to stress that hoarding can seriously affect the co-op's ability to deliver its repairs policy. Specifically:

- the co-op may not be able to carry out repairs within target timescales because contractors may not be able to access the home or the part of the home where a repair is necessary due to hoarding
- not being able to carry out repairs within target timescales may result in severe health and safety issues arising
- electrical safety tests (EICRs) may not be able to carried out due to contractors not being able to access electrical equipment, sockets and other electrical points
- gas safety checks (CP12s) may also not be able to be done if the contractor cannot access appropriately (and they may consider that the state of the hoarding itself is a reason not to declare the home safe).

Recognising the signs of hoarding

16 All staff, contractors and committee members who enter the homes of members should immediately report any hoarding related concerns to the Senior Housing Lead for investigation and follow up.

17 The signs of hoarding may include conditions of extreme clutter - especially where bathroom facilities, food storage, oven, heating sources and entry and exits are blocked and/or inability to throw things away that may seem to be, or actually are, rubbish eg. empty food containers, or papers stacked up in the living space.

18 Anything can be hoarded in many different areas including inside a home, the garden or communal areas. Items include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- clothes
- newspapers, magazines or books
- bills, receipts or letters
- food and/or containers
- collectables such as toys, DVDs or CDs
- animals
- rubbish
- data storage equipment (to store digital information that the member considers important).

Hoarding policy statement

19 The co-op will aim to identify and support members who display signs of excessive hoarding.

20 The co-op will differentiate between those members suffering from hoarding disorder and those breaching the terms of their tenancy through neglect, waste or not properly looking after their home and will act accordingly.

21 The co-op will, once hoarding has been identified, attempt to contact the member and engage with them to resolve the issue. With their consent, this may include seeking third party support from a floating support provider or from partner agencies. Where a safeguarding issue is identified, we will attempt to visit the same day.

22 Where family or friends are already involved and impacted, and are willing to co-operate, the co-op will encourage their assistance (whilst ensuring the co-op's compliance with GDPR principles). The co-op's priority is to engage with the member personally, wherever possible.

23 The co-op will attempt to identify any vulnerabilities or mental/physical disabilities the member suffers from and, if relevant, will seek to manage the process with regard to those vulnerabilities/disabilities in a fair and transparent way.

24 The co-op will consider the impact our requests could have on the member's mental health and will ensure they understand our obligations as a landlord to protect and maintain their and other occupants' health and safety, the health and safety of their neighbours and our homes.

25 The co-op will assess if a hoarding issue exists and will use the Clutter Image Rating Scale (CIRS) as a preliminary and objective assessment tool. CIRS is an image template showing a model room and the progressive degenerative impact of hoarding. Images from CIRS can be compared with the state and condition of the property for assessment purposes. See appendix A for the CIRS.

26 The co-op will work in partnership with other agencies to ensure services are provided in a co-ordinated way and to develop appropriate strategies for working with and responding to the needs of those members who hoard in order to address the issue.

Risk assessment – Clutter Image Ratings (CIRS - see Appendix One)

27 An assessment of risk will need to be made when a report is made of potential hoarding:

Low risk – no immediate health and safety issues (CIRS 1 to 3)
The home may appear cluttered in places but rooms can be used. There are no potential hazards and no risk to individuals, the home or neighbours. The situation has the potential to escalate and therefore monitoring may be required to ensure the home does not deteriorate to medium or high risk.

Medium risk – immediate health and safety issues (CIRS 4 to 6)
Substantial cluttering preventing rooms from being used for their intended purpose. Low to medium disrepair present in the home (including the potential for damp and mould caused by the clutter). This

level requires immediate action to safeguard the member, other occupants, neighbours or the home.

High risk – safeguarding issues (CIRS 7 to 9)

Immediate and considerable health and safety dangers are present that can cause severe disrepair (fire hazards, access issues, structural damage and inability to complete essential maintenance). This level requires immediate and urgent action to safeguard the member, other occupants, neighbours and/or the home. A safeguarding referral should be made in this case.

Prevention and support

28 The co-op is committed to supporting members with a hoarding tendency, who are willing to engage with support, whilst balancing the needs of other impacted people living in the homes and neighbouring residents.

29 With or without the consent of the member, the co-op will refer members it deems to be at risk of harm to social care for the purposes of assessment and support, if appropriate. The home and tenancy will also be flagged with colleagues in the Leicestershire Fire and Rescue Service as a high risk property

30 When a potential case of hoarding is highlighted, if the member is willing to engage, the co-op will conduct an initial assessment. Reasonable attempts will be made to persuade the member to engage with the co-op and relevant support will be offered.

31 The assessment will assess whether the member struggles with hoarding, the degree of risk to the member and others living in or near the property, and the member's willingness to engage with support. A decision over the appropriate course of action will then be made.

32 The co-op acknowledges that each case is individual and as such, the co-op will consider the most appropriate method of managing the case, considering a range of available options, and considering the severity and urgency of the situation. Options may include:

- an initial assessment of the property condition will be undertaken by the Senior Housing Lead by attending the Property with the member(s)
- agreeing a plan with the member to resolve their hoarding behaviours and start to clear the property of hoarded items. Dependent on the nature of the case, the co-op will consider particular requests for support to help clearing hoarded clutter. The co-op may particularly be able to offer some support from its Support Worker.
- where appropriate, referral onto another support provider, or to social care with or without the support of the member where the co-op considers that the member is in danger of harm as a result of the hoarding.
- sign posting to relevant organisations.

33 Particular consideration will be given to a personal evacuation plan in the event of fire.

34 Where the member is not willing to engage with the assessment and support process, or does not accept that there is a need for change, tenancy enforcement will be considered by the Senior Housing Lead in conjunction with the Chief Executive Officer.

35 Subject to compliance with GDPR principles, the co-op will engage with neighbours who are affected by the hoarding.

Enforcement

36 Taking enforcement action against a hoarding member who is not engaging with the co-op on the problem will need to balance the effect taking enforcement action will have on the member's mental health with the negative impact their hoarding has on their own health and safety, the health and safety of others and the effect on their home.

37 Tenancy enforcement may be necessary and this may include the use of:

- civil injunctions
- possession proceedings
- liaising with environmental health for enforcement

38 Enforcement action should only be taken where:

- the member's behaviour is so extreme as to cause significant harm to themselves or other persons
- there has been continuous failed engagement with the member and the member's actions are having a detrimental effect on themselves, other or the home
- where access to the home for gas safety checks or for other building safety compliance or repairs and improvements is required, has either been repeatedly refused or compromised by the hoarding issues, to ensure the co-op meets its legal and regulatory requirements.

39 Should enforcement action start, the co-op will continue to offer support to the member. Where it is suspected someone may lack mental capacity, the member should as a matter of urgency, refer the member to adult social services for a mental capacity assessment.

40 In the interest of public safety, the emergency services will be notified of cases where the clutter within a home presents an immediate risk to the welfare of others so that Fire Risk Assessments can be carried out.

41 Where a member engages and acknowledges the need for change, and where the most appropriate solution is the member is supported to move to an alternative home so that clearance can take place, the co-op will consider a temporary or permanent management transfer (only one offer of an alternative accommodation will usually be made).

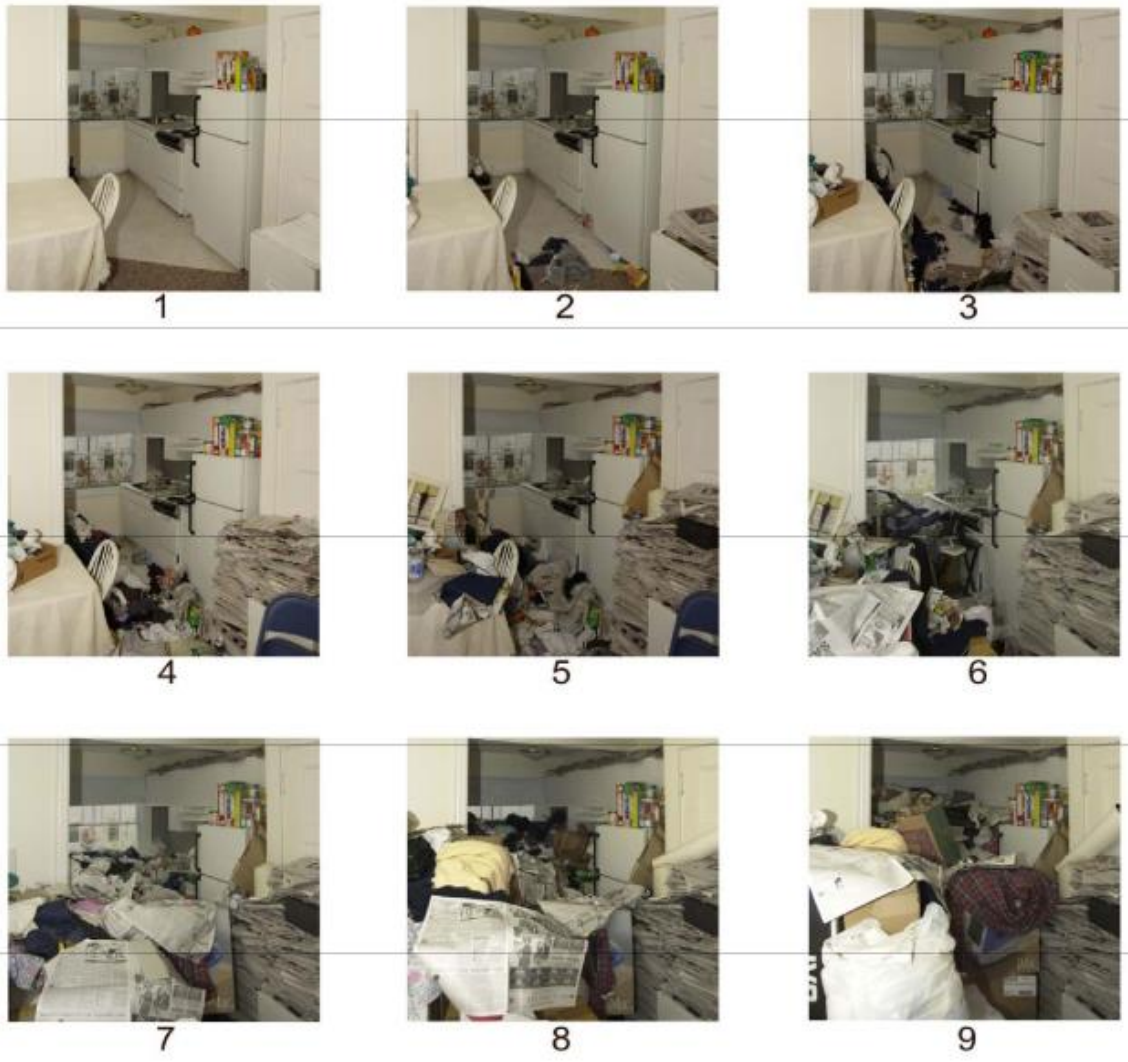
Potential risks to be avoided

- The co-op does not comply with its duty of care obligations to members who hoard, to other residents and to neighbours.
- The co-op does not satisfactorily protect the home and is unable to meet its repairs obligations.
- The co-op takes action against a member with hoarding disorder without first seeking to properly engage with them and support them.

Appendix A – Clutter Image Rating Scale

Clutter Image Rating Scale: Kitchen

Please select the photo below that most accurately reflects the amount of clutter in your room.



Clutter Image Rating: Bedroom

Please select the photo that most accurately reflects the amount of clutter in your room.

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

Clutter Image Rating: Living Room

Please select the photo below that most accurately reflects the amount of clutter in your room.