

HOARDING PROCEDURE

Report of the Director of Housing and Customer Service

1. SUMMARY

Derby Homes recognises that hoarders are a risk to themselves and their neighbours. Hoarders' The compulsive behaviour of hoarders also causes damage to property and ultimately a health and safety hazard to themselves and others. There are numerous documented cases of hoarders being crushed under piles of rubbish or dying in fires because the Fire Service are hampered due to floor to ceiling clutter. In January 2011, the Fire Service was called to a blaze in Long Eaton and fire fighters were forced to crawl through narrow gaps near to the ceilings in order to search each room. The occupier's body was not found for three days.

Derby Homes has developed a Hoarders Procedure to ensure that action is taken to deal with this issue in Derby thereby reducing the risk to residents of fatal fires and also to tackle public health issues. The Procedure is attached at Appendix 1.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The City Board is requested to approve the Hoarding Procedures which will become a subsection in Derby Homes Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

3. MATTER FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 Compulsive hoarding is a pattern of behaviour characterised by the excessive acquisition of, and an inability or unwillingness to discard, large quantities of unnecessary objects
- 3.2 The prevalence of hoarding is more common in older males and is identified with psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder. Frequently, hoarding behaviour is linked to alcohol dependency or mental illness.
- 3.3 Cluttered homes become inaccessible and can no longer be used for the intended purpose:
 - Beds cannot be slept in
 - Kitchens become filled with rotting food and combustible material such as newspapers and junk mail are piled onto cooker hobs
 - Bathrooms become filthy and unsanitary
 - Dead pets may also be present.

Commonly, hoarders are unwilling to give access to Derby Homes' staff for tenancy

matters, gas safety checks, repairs or maintenance.

- 3.4 Housing Officers are currently dealing with 30 cases of Hoarders across the City. Each case is being dealt with through a series of actions from safeguarding referrals to Social Care to legal action for possession. Two cases studies are attached in Appendix 2.

4. CONSULTATION IMPLICATIONS

A series of meetings were held between Environmental Health, Adult Services, the Community Mental Health Team and the Fire and Rescue Service; all supported the procedure.

5. FINANCIAL AND BUSINESS PLAN IMPLICATIONS

Clearing properties after hoarders is very expensive with one case alone costing £20,000 because of the extensive damage caused. There is also considerable officer time expended in resolving hoarding issues.

6. LEGAL AND CONFIDENTIALITY IMPLICATIONS

There are many legal options for Derby Homes including injunctions and eviction. Environmental Health also use Public Health Acts.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

Hoarders lifestyles not only create an eye-sore for other residents but their homes can become 'filthy and verminous' forcing their behaviour to be dealt with by Environmental Health and other public bodies.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

A blanket Equality Impact Assessment has not been completed as each case is assessed individually for equalities impacts and risk as outlined in the procedure.

10. HEALTH & SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

This procedure has been completed in conjunction with the Fire and Rescue Service and Environment Health.

The areas listed below have no implications directly arising from this report:

Council

Personnel

Risk

Policy Review

If Board Members or others would like to discuss this report ahead of the meeting please contact:

Author: Maureen Davis / Housing Operations Manager / 01332 888596 / maureen.davis@derbyhomes.org

Background Information: None.

Supporting Information: None.

Appendix 1

Hoarding Procedure



Hoarding is the excessive collection and retention of materials to the extent that they affect day to day living and create a potential hazard. Hoarding behaviour causes a nuisance or hazard to others as well as to the individual.

Derby Homes has a responsibility to address hoarding behaviour, to protect residents living in our properties.

Hoarding is a specific type of behaviour characterised by:

- acquiring and failing to throw out a large number of items that would appear to have little or no value to others (e.g. papers, notes, flyers, newspapers, clothes)
- severe cluttering of the person's home so that it is no longer able to function as a viable living space
- significant distress or impairment of work or social life

Staff suspecting that a tenant has a hoarding problem should complete the risk assessment in the early stages of this process.

Staff should be aware of these potential issues when dealing with hoarders:

- Hoarding is not in itself an indicator of poor mental health, but may be an indicator of underlying mental health problems.
- People with a hoarding problem can be socially isolated. They may not be used to dealing with people in their daily lives.
- Gather as much information as you can about the matter by talking to neighbours, support workers, friends and family including the risks posed by the behaviour. Observe and write about what you see in the property. Take photographs as necessary.
- If appropriate, enlist the help of family, friends and statutory or voluntary organisations, to build relationships with the hoarder and resolve the hoarding behaviour. However, be aware that hoarders are often reluctant to seek help and may even refuse it when offered.
- Do not prejudge the underlying causes of hoarding. Judging a hoarder may alienate them and make it harder for you to work with them.
- Hoarders often see their behaviour as normal. Your action plan should focus on tackling the problems hoarding causes – nuisance, and health and safety of themselves and others.
- Ensure that you do not use confrontational language when referring to the problem or the hoarder's possessions.
- Be aware of how hoarding may affect others, particularly vulnerable groups such as children, people with learning difficulties or disability and the elderly. **If you**

have concerns please refer to Derby Homes' Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.

- Animal welfare must also be considered where a hoarder is keeping pets. Concerns should be raised with the appropriate animal welfare organisation.
- The likelihood of hoarding reoccurring is quite high. Cases will inevitably have to be monitored once the initial problem has been resolved to ensure it does not reoccur.

When a hoarding case is identified staff need to follow the procedure attached. When setting up a case on CSM to log hoarding behaviour you should use the case type "Hoarders." The category is either "Hoarder" for cases involving purely hoarding behaviour, or "Filthy and Verminous" if there is hoarding behaviour as well as filthy and verminous conditions (as defined below). The Housing Management Trainer will also update a separate hoarding spreadsheet.

Guidelines on clearance of property

If a decision is taken to follow the support route, rather than enforcement, staff need to be aware of what clearance options are available to them.

Environmental Health have legal powers to tackle properties that are classed as filthy or verminous. They will also deal with properties where drug paraphernalia is discovered.

The definitions of filthy and verminous are as follows:

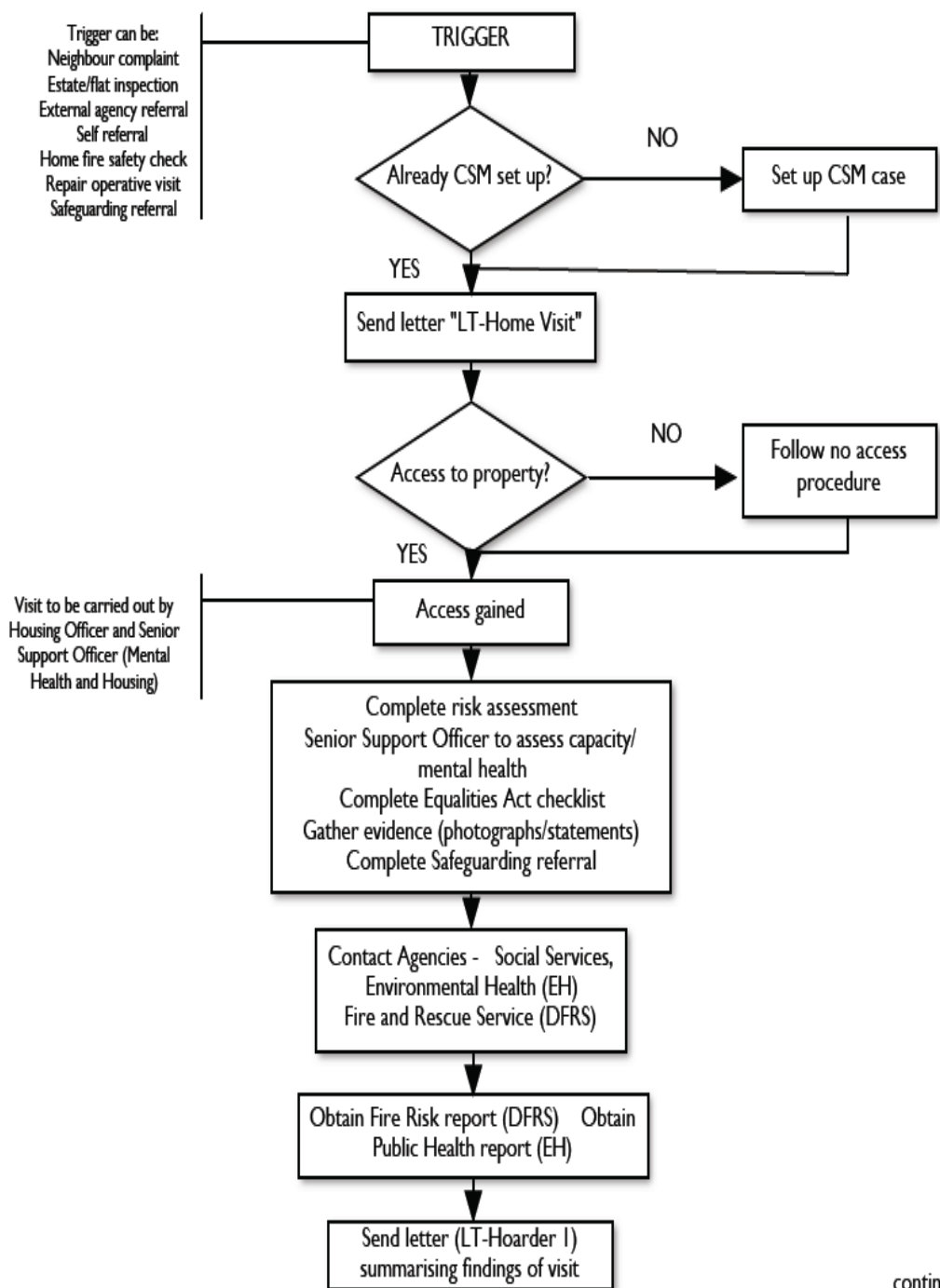
Filthy:

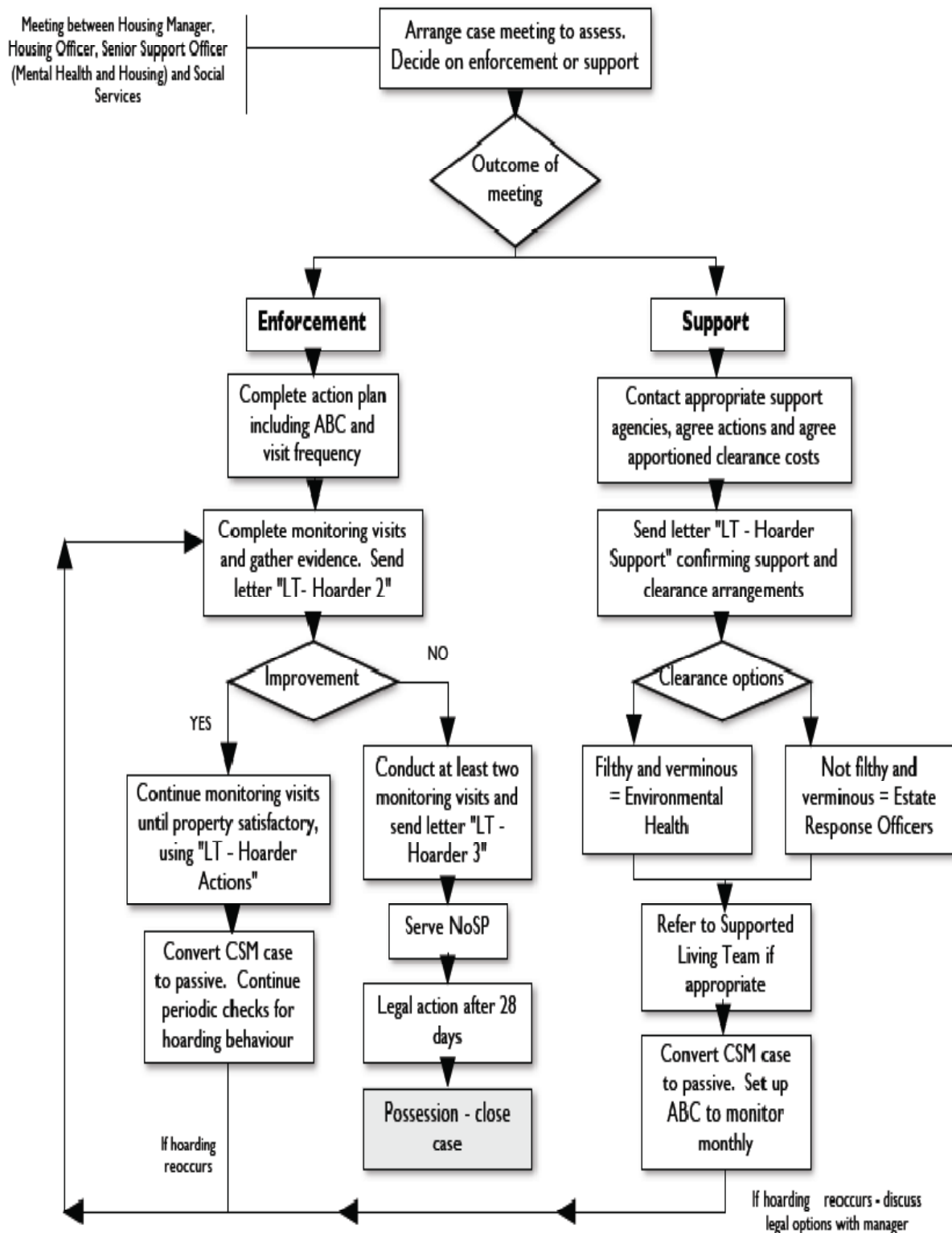
Homes which may be considered "filthy" may contain faecal matter (human and/or animal), rotting food, and piles of household waste containing food waste, vomit and generally anything which may be detrimental to the health of the occupier. "Filthy" does *not* include premises where it is simply untidy, where the waste is not liable to decay (e.g. newspapers / cardboard / electrical items etc) or where there is just staining on walls / furniture / bedding. However, these premises may still be "verminous".

Verminous:

Evidence of an infestation of rats, mice, fleas, cockroaches etc. It should be noted that if a property is in a generally good condition but has rats or mice then Environmental Health can take action under different legislation to ensure the infestation is dealt with.

If a property does not meet any of these criteria Environmental Health will not get involved and the Estate Response Officers should be used to clear the property.





CASE STUDIES

Mr C is a 58 year old man with a hearing impairment. His tenancy commenced in 1992 to a one bed room flat. Derby Homes were not aware of any problems until 2006 when a complaint was received about an infestation of mice at the property. The Housing Officer was unable to gain access to investigate. The gas safety check is became overdue.

The Housing Officer subsequently applied to the court for an order to gain entry to inspect the property and to allow the gas safety check to be carried out.

The flat was cluttered with newspapers and perishable food. Initially, the Housing Officer and a caretaker helped Mr C to clear the clutter and fill a skip with 5 tonnes of rubbish. Environmental Health dealt with the mice infestation. The Housing Officer appealed to Mr C's doctor for help but Mr C failed to turn up for the appointment.

2007 – The Housing Officer visited with an Environmental Health Officer. The flat was still cluttered with food; much of it out of date. Mr C sold newspapers for a local newsagent and was paid with out of date food. We continued to experience problems gaining access. A friend offered to help.

2008 - The Housing Officer gained entry and the flat was found to be full of perishable goods again. Mr C said he would accept help but did not want his family contacted. He was asked to fill bags himself and leave them outside for the caretaker to collect. Mr C failed to comply.

The Housing Officer continued with follow up visits and noted a small improvement. The Housing Officer referred Mr C to Social Care, who also failed to gain access. The Learning Disability Team had some involvement but are no longer supporting Mr C, who was not happy with the 'interference'.

2009 - Mr C's case referred to Community Mental Health Team. Mr C not considered as having a mental health problem. Limited access continued and Mr C was supported to remove rubbish. By 2010 the flat is cluttered again.

2011 - An Environmental Health Officer served a notice under the Public Health Act (1936). Gained entry and clearance completed again.

2012 – The property is cluttered again with perishable food. The Housing Officer serves a Notice of Seeking Possession and is awaiting court date for possession as all routes of support exhausted.

Ms S is 53 years old and signed up for her flat in 1987. In 2007 the Housing Officer carried out a property inspection. Every room was cluttered with paper and clothes and the worktops in the kitchen were covered in rubbish. Doors could not be opened and this was considered to be a serious fire risk.

Ms S has a support worker who agreed to help. The Housing Officer and Support Worker held a joint visit and set targets for Ms S. Ms S is given 3 weeks to clear rubbish. She was reluctant at first and under a warning that she may lose her tenancy, signed an Acceptable Behaviour Contract. The property is cleared and the Housing Officer visits every month to ensure that the problem does not re-occur.