

Hoarding services

How can local authorities overcome challenges to the way they support people with hoarding problems?

A Good Home Network briefing



Introduction

What do we know about the challenges faced by local authorities?



Hoarding is a major concern for local authorities who were part of the Centre for Ageing Better's evaluation of home improvement services across England (Ageing Better, 2025) as well as Good Home Network members.

They report an increase in the incidence of hoarding since the pandemic and expect to see a further rise in the next few years. But they also report funding for hoarding services has been reduced or withdrawn in some areas.

Hoarding can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or socio-economic status. However, its risks can increase for people as they age or those with health conditions, raising their chances of falls or injury and putting additional strain on already stretched services.

The Good Home Network came together to share their experiences of supporting people who hoard and to explore ways local authorities have found to support residents who need support to declutter or clear their homes.

What is the Good Home Network?

The Good Home Network is a hub for active learning connecting professionals across England who are exploring ways to improve poor quality homes in their area. The Centre for Ageing Better set up the Good Home Network, in partnership with Foundations, to help local authorities ensure people in their communities can live independently, safely and with dignity in their own homes.

Find out more:

Visit ageing-better.org.uk/good-home-network or email goodhomenetwork@ageing-better.org.uk

What is hoarding?

Hoarding behaviours can include excessive acquisition of objects, inability to discard possessions and a close attachment to them.

The psychological reasons behind this are manifold but can include eating disorders, Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder (OCPD) or traumatic life events that are linked to the onset of hoarding (accessed at [WHO 2025](#), [Hoarding UK, 2025](#)).

In the UK, it is widely estimated that the percentage of people who hoard at a clinically significant level is between 2% and 5% (equating to an estimated 1.4 million people). However, potentially only 5% of hoarders come to the attention of professionals (accessed at [Hoarding UK, 2025](#)).

Most people experiencing difficulties with hoarding are never diagnosed by health professionals and hoarding may often be perceived as a social rather than a mental health issue. It is often housing professionals who are in the front line of support.

1.4 million

Estimate of number of people in the UK who hoard¹

80%

of Good Home Network members polled identified hoarding as a growing issue²

¹ Accessed at [Hoarding UK, 2025](#)

² Poll taken at Good Home Network session July 2025



What are the consequences of hoarding?

People who hoard are faced with a wide range of consequences to their physical and mental health and wellbeing. This includes the risk of fire and death, risk of crushing, loneliness and social isolation, poor sanitation, poor nutrition, damage to property, risk to staff safety, pests and vermin, and complaints from neighbours. Hoarding also impacts mentally and emotionally on family members, friends and neighbours.

The negative impact of a home that is made unsafe by clutter and hoarded possessions can be greater for people as they age and/or are living with health conditions and are already at a higher risk of falls or injury.

This in turn impacts on services that are already stretched to the limit. For example, hoarding can delay hospital discharge as hoarded possessions and clutter in a person's home can create trip hazards, restrict movement around the home and access to bathing and toileting.



What are the challenges for home improvement services?

While local authorities and home improvement services recognise that hoarding is a growing problem, they face a range of challenges in supporting local residents who are struggling with hoarding.

Here are some examples of challenges from Good Home Network members. They are followed by some solutions on the next pages.

> Cost and resource limitation
A comprehensive hoarding service will be person-centred, trauma-informed and provide support over significant periods of time with trained and highly skilled staff. It will need sustained buy-in and engagement from partner agencies and sustained buy-in from multiple stakeholders. With competing priorities and reducing budgets, many local authorities struggle to fund and staff such a comprehensive approach.

> Making the case for a service
It is challenging to demonstrate the value – in terms of funding, prevention of further costs and impact on people’s health and wellbeing – of a time-consuming, complex service that involves multiple partners. Many areas struggle to collect data to measure the impact and calculate savings of a service.

> Having the right support in place
If a service does not meet the needs of its clients it will not be effective. For example, if clutter is removed from people’s homes but underlying issues or causes for their hoarding are not addressed, people are seen returning to services multiple times. Similarly, many people who could benefit from support do not receive help for reasons including: their behaviour is not recognised as problematic, they mask behaviour due to shame or embarrassment, and services do not identify them until a crisis point.

Solution 1

Locating people at the centre of a service

Taking a holistic, person-centred approach with trained and supported staff is vital to providing a service that works to help people who need support.

Ensuring staff can work with confidence, compassion, curiosity and have trusted conversations is key.

Find out more about these ways of working and training support from [Clouds End CIC](#)

✓ **Confidence** – training is key to developing a confident staff team. It will help to develop understanding of both the condition of hoarding but also what people need from a service and how they need to be supported. Confident staff and a confident service will understand that results will not happen overnight and a team effort is required.

✓ **Compassion** – “it makes you live longer and makes life easier”. Supporting clients to have self-compassion can help with allaying shame and helping people to recognise what they need.

✓ **Curiosity** – for team members, being curious can help build relationships and unearth solutions. For clients, curiosity can help them to think in new ways about how they live.

✓ **Conversations** – building trust is vital (both with clients and with a multiple partners). Conversations and time spent understanding and learning can help to do this.

“It is important to establish why we are learning about people who have hoarding behaviours and what do we want for them.”

GHN member

Solution **2**

Ensuring support at the right level

Middlesbrough's Staying Put Agency runs its hoarding intervention service within the home improvement service. The funding comes from the Better Care Fund under the prevention metric to prevent hospital admissions due to an individual's neglect and poor health.

It provides dedicated one-to-one support with trained caseworkers at a pace that is comfortable for each individual.

The service has identified three distinct types of hoarder:

- > The Collector** – excessive amounts of accumulated items result in unusable living spaces. They struggle to part with possessions and form emotional attachments.
- > The Accumulator** – large amounts of items can pose serious health and safety risks and attract vermin. They choose not to part with their items.
- > The Neglectful** – often after a significant life event, people who spend most of their time at home and let their living conditions deteriorate leading to chaotic conditions and shame or embarrassment.

By identifying most clients in the third category, the hoarding intervention service can assist people in the short term with a 'reset' – removing unwanted clutter and performing a deep clean – and also provide ongoing and long-term support to those who need it that is shown to stop most people from coming back to the service.



Solution 3

Running support groups and champions

Creating support groups where people who have been through a service come together to share their bond and/or support others can be a successful way of helping people. Peer support can help to reduce shame that people who hoard may feel and support groups can provide a safe space where people can share and bond.

Champions who are supported to speak out about their experience and about a service can be a powerful way of promoting a service both to other potential service users and to commissioners, funders or referral partners.



“It is so important to share the good stories.”

GHN member



Solution 4

Working in partnership to secure funding

Multi-agency working can open a diversity of funding options with sources including adult social care, environmental health, fire services, homelessness and mental health teams.³ There is also the possibility of attracting philanthropic funding, notably to fund peer support groups and champions.



With multiple services competing for reduced local authority funding, it is key to be able to demonstrate how supporting people to declutter and clean their homes can be preventative and reduce the potential for other costs. Producing an analysis of financial costs, social return on investment and cost-benefit of charging for services for some people can help to secure funding. Birmingham City Council produced research into hoarding that includes helpful analysis (Birmingham City Council, 2016).

³ An example of procurement strategy and cost of service for Camden Council can be found [here](#)



Solution 5

Making every contact count



The condition of the property where a person who hoards lives may precipitate engagement with home improvement services, but it is important to develop a local structure where every contact with the client counts, as hoarding is often a hidden issue.

For example, staff from any service that meet clients at their home can holistically assess if the client would benefit from being referred to the local team that deals with hoarding.

In addition, giving people routes into a service through self-referral (including family, friends, neighbours) can be a way of getting help to those who need it most. At this point lighter touch support – similar to that proposed for ‘the neglectful’ on page 6 – may be enough to prevent hoarding becoming a longer-term, more entrenched problem.

Using the **Clutter Image Ratings** tool can help to rate the level of hoarding and assess whether a client would receive a visit or would be signposted to self-help guidance, websites or advice.



Useful resources



- > **Foundations (2021) Hoarding: A report into best practice** – foundations.uk.com/hoarding-a-report-into-best-practice-launched/
- > **NHS Resources** can be accessed at nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/hoarding-disorder/
- > **Other sites to support hoarders** – [Clouds End CIC/ Hoarding Disorders/Hoarding Support/ Lofty Heights](#)

Don't forget...

The Centre for Ageing Better can help promote stories of success more widely. If you have worked with people who are hoarders or helped people to declutter or improve their home, do let us know on goodhomenetwork@ageing-better.org.uk. We regularly have enquiries from national and local media outlets who would like to speak to someone directly about their experiences.

References

- > Birmingham City Council (2016) Research into Hoarding Final Report bsab.org/downloads/file/96/birmingham-city-council-research-into-hoarding-final-report
- > Centre for Ageing Better (2025). Better Homes, better lives: The role of home improvement services in boosting the nation's health and wellbeing ageing-better.org.uk/evaluation-existing-home-improvement-services
- > Clutter Image Rating – find out more at: hoarding.iocdf.org/professionals/clinical-assessment/
- > Hoarding UK hoardinguk.org/ [accessed August 2025]
- > World Health Organization icd.who.int/dev11/f/en#/http%3a%2f%2fid.who.int%2ficd%2fentity%2f1991016628 [accessed August 2025]



Let's take action today for all our tomorrows.
Let's make ageing better.



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