

Reconnections Statement & Procedure

1. Purpose of the Reconnections Policy

The purpose of this Reconnections Policy is to create a fair system that enables rough sleepers, particularly those who are newly arrived on the streets and who are assessed through NSNO, to return to their home area in a planned and safe way. It also makes it clear, to all agencies and to rough sleepers, who is likely to be helped to return home and how; setting out the procedure for reconnecting people between the 6 local authority areas within Cumbria and elsewhere.

2. Definitions

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions will apply:

Rough Sleepers

People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or “bashes”).

Source: Evaluating the Extent of Rough Sleeping, Communities and Local Government, 2010.

NB. The definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organised protest, squatters or travellers.

Local Connection

The concept of local connection is derived from section 199 of Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (see below). However, this policy does **not** concern individuals to whom the Council may owe a housing duty under the Act. This policy applies to people the Council has no duty toward, or would be unlikely to have a duty toward were they to make a homelessness application under the Act.

Section 199 provides that a person has a local connection with the district of a housing authority if he or she has a connection with it:

- 1) because he or she is, or was in the past, normally resident there, and that residence was of his or her own choice; or*
- 2) because he or she is employed there; or*
- 3) because of family associations there; or*
- 4) because of any special circumstances.*

The local authority conducting an assessment under this reconnection policy is responsible for determining where the client has a local connection before assisting with reconnection to an alternative area.

Identifying Authority

The identifying local authority is either:

- the locality where the individual is sleeping rough where an approach by the local authority is made to the individual to assist them; or
- the locality where the individual (or a third party) has approached a local authority stating they are sleeping rough.

Receiving Authority

The individual's "home" authority, with which they are deemed to be reconnected, is the receiving authority.

3. Key Principles

- It is not acceptable for people to sleep rough anywhere within Cumbria.
- All new rough sleepers will be quickly assessed.
- New rough sleepers without a connection to Cumbria will have access to local housing services limited to the time it will take to make the assessment and arrange a suitable reconnection with the receiving authority or agency [NB. see exceptions in 4 (iii) below].
- However, individuals refusing a suitable arranged reconnection may still be offered some services locally as part of the local strategy to prevent rough sleeping (including any arrangements made in respect of severe weather provision).

4. The Reconnection Procedure

- i. A rough sleeper is identified within a district in Cumbria (this may be via a direct approach by the individual, local agencies, the public or by outreach).
- ii. An assessment of the individual's housing and support needs, by the local authority Homelessness/Housing Options team, identifies that there is not likely to be a homeless duty owed and there is a connection to another district in Cumbria or elsewhere.
- iii. Identify if it is safe for the individual to return to the area where they have a connection – it is not appropriate to consider assisting reconnection in certain circumstances, including situations where: the client is fleeing domestic violence or the threat of violence; the client is fleeing other violence by persons not associated with the client, including racial violence; a return to a specific area could lead to the client's return to substance/alcohol misuse; the risk created by renewing associations with previous acquaintances may be also be sufficient to warrant an exception from the reconnection policy; an injunction, ASBO or bail conditions prevent their return to a specific area.
- iv. Where the client cannot be reconnected to an area for specific reasons, including those listed above, frontline officers should explore other potential local authority areas where the client may be reconnected. If it is deemed there are no suitable local authority areas for the individual to be reconnected to, then reconnection would not be appropriate.
- v. Obtain consent, for reconnection to home area, from the individual.
- vi. Make contact with the receiving authority (this may have been initiated earlier in relation to safety concerns – see iii above) to ensure that accommodation and/or support services are available for the individual in the receiving authority. This may be more difficult in relation to people from abroad (see below for Reconnections out of the Country), but every effort should be made to contact friends, family or some support network in the person's country of origin. No individual should be reconnected without prior agreement with the receiving borough.

- vii. If accommodation is not immediately available in the receiving authority (for example: keys have to be located for a tenancy or a hostel bed has to be found), the individual should be provided with emergency accommodation within the borough in which they have been found rough sleeping.
- viii. If agreement is reached by the receiving authority to accept the individual, arrangements should be made to agree the transfer, including travel arrangements.
- ix. Where possible the individual should be accompanied to the train/bus station.
 - x. The receiving authority should be advised that the person is on their way.
 - xi. Check that the individual arrived safely and that reconnection was successful.
 - xii. The local authority within which the rough sleeper has been identified should fund the reconnection.

5. Reconnections out of the Country

Where the person seeking help is from another country, they may need support in order to return, particularly if they have been homeless for a while.

Those who have the means to obtain accommodation on return may require help to pay for their travel.

Those who have been homeless in the UK for a while, or who have other needs such as poor health or substance misuse problems, may require further help, including:

- help to recover or re-apply for passports and other papers
- support to find an organisation which can arrange accommodation and other assistance on return
- support to make contact with housing organisations
- help to find the money for the journey home
- help to reach the airport or station, or in some cases, accompanying them to ensure that they do get on the plane, train or bus

Guidance on reconnecting people to another country is available on several websites:

<http://homeless.org.uk/cee-reconnection#.Ugm4vPCYbIU>

<http://www.thamesreach.org.uk/what-we-do/routes-home/>

<http://tlcuk.biz/en/support/consulates-embassies-fco-notaries/uk-embassies>

6. Clients with no connection to any area

If a verified rough sleeper does not have a meaningful local connection with any area, they should be helped by the council in the area where they make an approach. If they are receiving regular *specialist* care or treatment in the area where they are now, it might be necessary to arrange accommodation there, if a move would disrupt treatment or care that could not be provided in their home area or country.

NB. where a rough sleeper has been discharged from an institution, the question of whether they have a local connection or not can be complex. There should be clear prison release and hospital discharge planning processes in each area for these specific cases.

7. Quarterly Monitoring

- number of people reconnected and cost per case
- district/borough or country each client returned to
- type of accommodation provided (if known)
- the number of people for whom reconnection was not possible (including refusals) and the reason (unsafe, no accommodation, refusal, etc)
- number of people who returned after reconnection (within 6 months)

8. Disputes

Any disputes will be referred to the relevant Service Manager(s) and raised at the NSNO Project Group meetings as necessary.