



Bournemouth's Reconnections Protocol

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1. Introduction

The Reconnections Protocol has been developed to improve access to housing related support services (formerly Supporting People funded services) particularly for those with a local connection to Bournemouth who need those services.

The protocol also aims to actively support those without a local connection who are rough sleeping or are at risk of rough sleeping to return in a planned way to an area where they have accommodation, support networks or some other connection. The protocol hopes to avoid people travelling between areas to rough sleep and therefore avoid perpetuating street lifestyles.

It is important to note that the protocol provides safeguards for rough sleepers without a local connection who are particularly vulnerable and where reconnection is either unavailable or inappropriate.

The rough sleeper street count has reduced from 44 in 1997 to 11 persons counted in 2012. Whilst this is a success, rough sleeping remains an issue both locally and nationally. The protocol aims to reduce the number of people sleeping rough in Bournemouth by preventing migration of rough sleepers between areas and minimising people coming to Bournemouth seeking homeless services.

This Protocol sets out the procedures to be followed when establishing an individual's local connection to Bournemouth as a pre-requisite to accessing supported housing. It sets out how individuals will be helped to be reconnected to an area where they have support networks.

This Protocol should be used as a guide for housing related support providers and referring agencies.

The principle of reconnecting rough sleepers is now well established. Most recently, the 'No Second Night Out' vision advocates reconnecting people back to their area of local connection unless there is good reason not to return. This enables people to access housing, recovery services and support from family and friends.

Bournemouth's Housing Strategy 2013-2020 aims to reduce homelessness and rough sleeping in the Borough. One action within this includes - 'Implementing a revised reconnections policy for rough sleepers without a local connection which provides a quicker reconnections process and a different approach for those rough sleeping for the first time'. This revised protocol addresses this.

Bournemouth Borough Council has a contract with Crime Reduction Initiatives (CRI) to deliver an assertive outreach service to rough sleepers. This service is known as the Street Services Team (SST) which has over 200 rough sleeper engagements per month. The SST plays a key role in delivering this protocol.

The hostel at 10 St Paul's Lane (10 SPL) is currently direct access and is the only facility of this type in the sub-region. By default it has become a sub-regional resource for rough sleepers. The demand for access can be high and, despite its size, there are times when the demand for beds at 10 SPL outweighs availability.

Funds available to local authorities are reducing and we therefore need to ensure that services are prioritised for rough sleepers who need services and who are from Bournemouth.

Providing homeless services to people without a local connection has a significant impact on the demands not only placed on homeless services but on the wide range of related services that individuals may need such as health care and drug treatment services.

Bournemouth will share the detail of this protocol with other local authorities to achieve a shared understanding. We aim to work co-operatively and positively with other local authorities to achieve reduced rough sleeping in Dorset and the wider sub-region (See Appendix 2 for emergency contact numbers for other Local Authorities).

2. Legal and strategic frameworks

This Reconnections Protocol will support and be consistent with the following legislation:

- The Housing Act 1996, Part VII, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002
- S.17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (a duty for the Council to consider the crime and disorder implications of all of its functions)

The Protocol does not seek to override any legal requirements or obligations which are placed on any agencies involved in the implementation. In particular, where a local housing authority has accepted a legal duty to rehouse a rough sleeper or single homeless person under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002, the Reconnections Protocol will not be applied.

3. 'Rough Sleepers' Definition

In order to provide a common understanding of who may be considered to be a rough sleeper, a rough sleeper is someone who is as follows :-

- Rough sleeping on the streets
- Sleeping in tents, cars and other vehicles not designed for sleeping in
- Sleeping in abandoned buildings

4. 'Vulnerability' Definition

Vulnerability has a range of different meanings to different agencies. The dictionary definition is 'exposed or open to the chance of coming to harm, either physically, emotionally or psychologically'.

In contrast to this, the homelessness definition of vulnerability is a far tighter definition and places a higher threshold on the client. When assessing whether someone with no local connection is eligible for housing related services due to exceptional circumstances of vulnerability, the homelessness definition of 'vulnerable' will be applied. See Appendix 3 for the definition of 'vulnerable'.

5. 'Local Connection' definition

For the purposes of this Protocol a local connection to Bournemouth will be established if the client meets any one of the following (further guidance is contained in Appendix 1):

Residence

The person must have lived in Bournemouth for at least 6 months out of the previous 12 months, or 3 years out of the previous 5 years. Residence may include for example a tenancy or other settled accommodation supported by evidence.

The following will NOT be considered as having established a local connection to Bournemouth:

- sleeping rough, living in tents, squats, cars and other arrangements not intended for residential occupation
- time spent in approved premises (formerly known as bail hostels)
- time spent in Bournemouth in detox, treatment, or rehabilitation where placed by an agency from outside of Bournemouth. The placing Local Authority will have responsibility for move-on as part of the recovery process.

Employment

The person has legal and meaningful employment in Bournemouth.

Meaningful employment is considered to be part or full time employment which is permanent, not casual or seasonal employment.

This includes serving members of HM Armed Forces and other persons who normally live with them as part of their household, who are serving or have served in Bournemouth.

Those who work outside of Bournemouth for a company whose head office is based in Bournemouth will not be considered as having a local connection.

Family Association

The person has close family living in Bournemouth. The relationship needs to be sufficiently significant and direct, in the form of frequent contact, commitment or dependency.

Close family means: parents, adoptive parents, adult brothers or sisters, adult children. Other relatives are included where there is evidence to support that close links have been maintained. Other relatives include grandparents and aunt/uncle.

The family members must have been resident in Bournemouth for at least 5 years at the date of contact by the client. Dependent children and other family members should not be regarded.

6. Services and Partners

Members of the Homelessness Strategy Group have been involved in the development of this protocol as it has evolved over recent years. There have been a number of different versions over the last few years, with each revised version tightening access to services for those without a local connection to help priorities reducing resources.

All partners working in the homeless sector locally are required to work in the spirit of this protocol and implement it in a coordinated and consistent approach. The Council's contractual partners are expected to implement this Protocol (including housing related support providers) and funding is conditional on this basis.

7. Local Connection and eligibility for housing related support

It is important to note that the Bournemouth Women's Refuge remains open access irrespective of local connection. This service is required to ensure that households can be safely accommodated where they are fleeing domestic violence.

All referrals into services, aside from the Women's Refuge, need to go via the SP Hub.

In order to access any other housing related support accommodation service in Bournemouth, a person must be able to provide information and evidence that provides proof that they have a local connection to Bournemouth.

The Strategic Housing Options team determines the definition of local connection and therefore determines eligibility to services on this basis.

If local connection is not determined by contact with the Strategic Housing Options team, cases where local connection is uncertain should be referred to the SST for clarification.

The SP Hub will confirm eligibility for people referred to them on the grounds of local connection in order to consequently confirm the ability to access housing related support services.

Establishing local connection forms the initial part of the assessment process undertaken by agencies. Referring agencies are recommended to consult the advice notes in Appendix 1 of this Protocol when considering whether the person has a local connection.

Those people having a local connection to Bournemouth will be eligible for housing related support. The period of stay in services will be compatible with the nature of the accommodation and subject to engagement and compliance with the licence to occupy.

Currently, referrals into 10 St Paul's Lane are not managed via the SP Hub. The SST will work to reconnect people approaching 10 St Paul's Lane where appropriate. People without a local connection should be referred directly to the SST.

In the majority of cases, a client with a local connection to Bournemouth will want to access local services. Nevertheless, out of area options should still be considered and offered where the client has expressed a desire to relocate.

8. Exceptions to the Local Connection criteria

It is recognised that there will be circumstances when it will not be appropriate to reconnect those who have a local connection outside of Bournemouth. Where this is the case, households without a local connection may be considered eligible to access housing related support services in Bournemouth.

Exceptional cases will be determined on a case-by-case basis and all such cases need to be referred to the Council's Housing Needs Manager (01202 454891) who will decide whether the circumstances of the client are deemed appropriate to constitute an exception. This will include consultation with the SST, the housing related support team, the SP Hub Team and other associated parties, as appropriate.

The exceptions below should not be considered as an exhaustive list and exceptions will be determined on a case-by-case basis. Evidence will be required :-

- Those who have no identifiable area elsewhere to which they can safely access housing, support and social networks may be provided with access to a full range of homelessness and related services in Bournemouth.
- Where it is considered to be unsafe for a client to return to an area where they have a connection. It is not reasonable for a person to return to an area if it is probable that it will lead to violence. Violence may include domestic violence (whether carried out in the home or outside the home by persons associated with the client) or other violence by persons not associated with the client including racial violence. For further information refer to Appendix 1.

- Where a client is considered too vulnerable to return to their identifiable area of connection, a full stay in the relevant supported housing scheme may be considered. Such decisions will be made in consultation with all lead professionals involved in the client's case, specifically health and mental health homelessness services.
- The needs of offenders will be considered as possible grounds to warrant an exception. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis by the Council's Housing Needs Manager in consultation with the housing related support team and SP Hub team and the following factors will be taken into account:
 - Offenders managed under Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA)
 - Where conditions of a licence or order, imposed by the court, prevents the client from living in the area to which they have a local connection (i.e - to prevent further contact with their victim and/or their family, for the offender's own protection or to prevent re-offending). Evidence to explain why Bournemouth is the most suitable area of placement will be required. A lack of suitable supported accommodation in other areas outside of Bournemouth will not be deemed as a justifiable reason to constitute a placement in Bournemouth under exceptional circumstances.

When prioritising voids as part of the SP Hub process, a client assessed as having a local connection to Bournemouth will have priority over a client granted a stay under exceptional circumstances.

Where a client without a local connection has been granted a stay in housing related support services, the housing related support team will make contact with the local authority to which they may have a local connection to pursue a commitment to fund the client's placement in Bournemouth and guarantee that they will rehouse the client within 5 months of the placement. Where agreement is made, this will be substantiated in writing by the placing local authority. This funding commitment and re-housing guarantee will not be a condition of the exception.

9. Reconnecting those without a local connection

The SST will be the principal agency responsible for actively seeking to reconnect clients safely to the supportive networks in their home area or where they have a proven link.

Staff at partner agencies who have contact with the client will support the SST by encouraging the client to engage in the reconnection process.

Where a client is assessed as having no local connection to Bournemouth and their circumstances have been assessed as not meeting the exceptions to the local connection criteria, the client should be referred to the SST (01202 315962 or 07921 234928). The SST will also gain direct referrals through their contact with rough sleepers on the streets.

Upon receipt of the referral the SST will commence an assessment of the client's reconnection needs immediately. As part of that, the SST will check whether the exceptions to the policy apply to that individual.

The assessment will be led by the SST, in consultation with any other agencies and/or professionals involved in the client's case, such as health and mental health homelessness services, to ensure that the client's needs are established as part of the reconnection process.

As assessment as to whether exceptional circumstances apply is a key element of the reconnections protocol to make sure that safeguards are in place. This assessment will be carried out before someone is reconnected.

Where it can be proven that the service user can be safely reconnected back to their area of locality, SST are to reconnect the client back to their home address as soon as is possible.

The assessment of housing and support needs should enable the assessor and client to mutually agree geographic locations and accommodation types for reconnection - consent for reconnection must therefore be obtained from the client. It should be made clear to the client that engaging in this process is an opportunity to secure accommodation with a view to creating a stable lifestyle. The opportunity to connect to another area is not to be used as a means of travelling the country.

The SST will endeavour to obtain direct confirmation that there will be some form of accommodation (and other services where relevant) available for the client on arrival. Where this is not possible, the SST will ensure that an appointment is made with the Local Authority and/or a relevant key worker. Every effort should be made to avoid simply displacing the situation to another area. The SST will ensure that if rough sleepers are referred to other areas, that reasonable assurance is received that sufficient arrangements are in place to prevent rough sleeping in those areas.

The SST is responsible for administering funds to pay for reconnections costs (e.g. train tickets). The fund to the SST is part of their contract and is only available to reconnect those who are rough sleeping or are potentially at risk of rough sleeping. The SST are responsible for funding and arranging the necessary travel arrangements and, where possible, accompanying the client to the train/bus station.

The key worker in Bournemouth will advise and agree with equivalent service providers (in the locality that the client is travelling to) the arrangements regarding the reconnection of the client.

When arranging reconnection, the SST will check to see if the journey has been successful, preferably with the new accommodation provider but if that is not possible, with the client.

10. Interim accommodation for those without a local connection

All households without a local connection (that are not deemed an exception) will be assessed and efforts will be made to seek reconnection the same day as receiving the referral.

However, in some circumstances this may not be possible for complex cases or where travel options are not available daily. In these situations, a single offer of accommodation in Bournemouth may be provided during the working week (Monday to Friday) in line with the 'No Second Night Out' vision.

The accommodation will differ according to whether the individual is new to rough sleeping or not.

Clients that are assessed as new to rough sleeping may be offered a bed and breakfast placement by the SST whilst reconnection is being arranged. This will help to avoid any contact with the street culture and therefore help reconnect people with minimum disruption.

Clients that are not new to rough sleeping will be offered accommodation by the SST within a housing related support scheme if a void in an appropriate service is available. This will be arranged via the SP Hub team. If an SP Hub void is not available, a bed and breakfast placement may be provided.

The placements into bed and breakfast will be monitored on an ongoing basis and the extent of placements may need to be prioritised or limited subject to finances available.

11. Refusal of reconnection

Where a service user refuses to be reconnected via SST, that service user will be denied access to accommodation or homeless services in Bournemouth. SST will continue to work assertively to engage with the service user and reconnect them to their area of locality.

Those people who have disengaged with the reconnection process, or who have returned to the town after being relocated will be viewed as disengaging from the reconnection process and will continue to be excluded from all services except the SST.

12. Out of hours/weekend service

The SST will provide a weekend service to help reconnect people appropriately as soon as they arrive in Bournemouth. This will help to ensure that a consistent message is provided regarding the reconnections protocol and to avoid people becoming established in a street lifestyle within Bournemouth.

No interim accommodation placements will be provided by the SST during the weekends.

The SST will seek to reconnect people during the weekend wherever practical and placements with family and friends during the weekends may be the most possible options at this time. Where links with agencies are required during office hours, the SST will pursue reconnection on the following Monday.

13. Severe Weather Emergency Protocol

The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol will override this protocol. This is described in a separate procedure and is activated when the weather is predicted to drop below zero for more than three consecutive nights.

14. Homelessness Legislation

It is recognised that rough sleepers are particularly vulnerable and require services beyond 'mainstream' homelessness. For example, rough sleepers tend to be unwilling to visit statutory agencies with regard to their homelessness. Services for rough sleepers are therefore designed to encourage engagement, not to prevent access to statutory rights. Rough sleepers are, of course, entitled to and may wish to make a homelessness application.

If a homelessness application is made, the investigation would cover the following areas:

- Eligibility for assistance - the homelessness legislation makes certain persons from abroad ineligible for housing assistance
- The person's history of homelessness and whether they contributed to this - intentionality
- Is the person in "priority need"? The technical definition of priority need, in the context of the legislation, is, if when homeless, would the person be less able to fend for themselves than an ordinary homeless person so that (s)he would suffer injury or detriment, in circumstances where a less vulnerable person would be

able to cope without harmful effects. Detriment in this context might include a significantly increased risk of suicide or of developing some serious ailment. See Appendix 3 for more details about 'vulnerability'.

For further advice and to make an application, contact the Council's Strategic Housing Options team or for independent advice, contact Shelter.

15. Monitoring

The operation and outcomes of the Reconnections Protocol will be monitored and reported to Bournemouth's Homelessness Strategy Group as appropriate.

16. Agency awareness

Advice and/or training for agencies are needed to ensure that both staff and service users are well informed.

Agencies are required to liaise with the Council's Strategic Housing Options team to ensure that all staff working with homeless households are fully informed.

The Council's Strategic Housing Options team will lead on the training issues related to this policy. Any updates of this protocol will be issued to all relevant parties.

17. Rough sleeper referrals

People are encouraged to refer cases of rough sleepers to the SST on 01202 315962 or 07921 234928. Alternatively, the national 'Streetlink' resource can be used to inform the SST of a rough sleeper that may need assistance - by contacting www.streetlink.org.uk or 0300 500 0914.

18. Complaints and Queries

Any queries or complaints regarding the implementation of this protocol should be forwarded to the Council's Strategic Housing Services Manager (01202 454784), the Council's Housing Needs Manager (01202 454891) or the Team Leader at Bournemouth Street Services Team (01202 315962 or 07921 234928).

APPENDIX 1

ADVICE ON IMPLEMENTING THE LOCAL CONNECTION CRITERIA

With regard to the assessment of criteria and the evidence that is required, agencies should ask for every element of evidence listed for each connection category under which the client is claiming. In addition any evidence should be followed up where possible with phone calls etc to verify the claim. Clients cannot rely on one element alone to claim a connection.

Assessing Local Connections Criteria

Agencies will need to be satisfied on the information provided by clients before accepting that a local connection exists.

Residence

It is suggested that clients should be requested to provide:

- details of addresses
- dates of residence at those addresses
- name and address of landlord
- name and address of doctor

Residence at addresses can be checked through the Electoral Register and Housing Benefit.

Employment

It is suggested that clients be requested to provide:

- Name and contact details of employer
- Place of employment
- Nature of employment
- NI number

If necessary this information may need to be checked with the employer.

Family Associations

It is suggested that clients be requested to provide:

- Name of qualifying family member
- Address(es) of qualifying family member
- Dates of residence of qualifying family members at stated addresses

If necessary details of family members can be checked through the Electoral Register and Housing Benefit.

A decision relating to family association as a local connection should consider whether the relationship is sufficiently significant and direct, in the form of frequent contact, commitment or dependency. The family members must have been resident in Bournemouth for at least 5 years at the date of contact by the client.

Violence

Agencies must be satisfied on the information provided by clients before accepting that there is a real risk of violence.

It is suggested that clients should be requested to provide the following information;

- Who committed the violence - did the client know the perpetrator, was it a family member?
 - What was the nature of the violence - was it actual violence or threats?
 - What was the cause/reason for the violence?
 - Where was the violence committed?
 - When was the violence committed?
 - Was this an isolated incident or has it been a series of incidents?
 - Was the violence reported to the police or other agency?
-
- Do they have a crime number? If clients say that they have suffered violence they would be issued with a crime number when reporting the crime. This can then be checked on to verify the claim.

Even where there may be an indication that violence or threats of violence have been carried out it does not automatically rule out a return to the area from where the client has arrived. An isolated or random incident does not indicate that there is a probability of further violence. Furthermore a client can be returned to area of origin away from the location of violence without there being a probability of further violence or threats.

It needs to be borne in mind that it is possible for people to obtain injunctions or restraining orders to protect themselves.

APPENDIX 2

EMERGENCY OUT OF HOURS LOCAL AUTHORITY CONTACT NUMBERS

Poole - 0800 506050

Christchurch - 01202 480856

East Dorset - 01202 480856

West Dorset - 01305 251010

Weymouth and Portland - 01202 668123

New Forest - 02380 285000

Purbeck District Council - 01929 558455

Bournemouth - 01202 452795

APPENDIX 3

LOCAL AUTHORITY DEFINITION OF VULNERABLE

VULNERABILITY

A person may have a priority need for accommodation if he or she is vulnerable as a result of:

- i) old age;
- ii) mental illness or learning disability (mental handicap) or physical disability;
- iii) having been looked after, accommodated or fostered and is aged 21 or more;
- iv) having been a member of Her Majesty's regular naval, military or air forces;
- v) having been in custody or detention;
- vi) ceasing to occupy accommodation because of violence from another person or threats of violence from another person which are likely to be carried out; or
- vii) any other special reason.

In the case of i), ii) and vii) only, a person with whom a vulnerable person lives or might reasonably be expected to live also has a priority need for accommodation and can therefore make an application on behalf of themselves and that vulnerable person.

It is a matter of judgement whether the applicant's circumstances make him or her vulnerable. When determining whether an applicant in any of the categories set out at i) - ii) above is vulnerable, the local authority should consider whether, when homeless, the applicant would be less able to fend for him/herself than an ordinary homeless person so that he or she would suffer injury or detriment, in circumstances where a less vulnerable person would be able to cope without harmful effects.

Some of the factors which may be relevant to determining whether a particular category of applicant is vulnerable are set out below. The assessment of an applicant's ability to cope is a composite one, taking into account all of the circumstances. The applicant's vulnerability must be assessed on the basis that he or she is or will become homeless, and not on his or her ability to fend for him or herself while still housed.

The Homeless team will determine vulnerability. Any queries will need to be the Council's Housing Needs Manager (01202 454891).

(Source : Homelessness Code of Guidance 2006, Communities and Local Government)