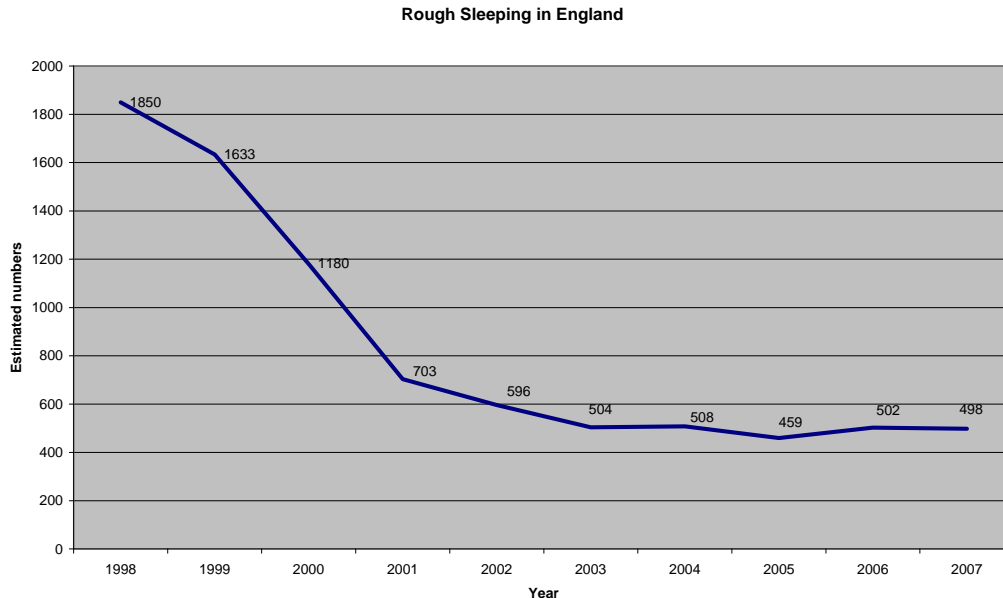


# Norwich Reconnection Policy for Rough Sleepers August 2008

## 1 Background

- 1.1 In 1998 the government set a target to reduce rough sleeping in England by two-thirds by 2002. The graph below demonstrates that this target was achieved. However, there has been no significant progress in the last four years, although there remains a national commitment to further reductions in rough sleeping.



Source: Homelessness Statistics September 2007 and Rough Sleeping – 10 Years on from the Target Policy Briefing 20, CLG, 2007

- 1.2 In 2002 the government published *More than a Roof* – a report which sets out a new approach to tackling homelessness – an approach which placed the emphasis on understanding and addressing the personal and social causes of homelessness alongside structural issues such as housing supply.
- 1.3 In October 2006 the government published *Getting Connected - Guidelines for operating reconnections policies for rough sleepers*. This document called on all local authorities to consider the introduction of local reconnection policies as part of a coordinated approach to reducing overall rough sleeping numbers.
- 1.4 *Getting Connected* recognised that there is a very real risk that short term, “crisis” rough sleeping, resulting from an immediate loss of accommodation, can lead to someone falling into a longer term pattern of “entrenched” rough sleeping.
- 1.5 Such entrenchment is severely damaging to the individual, often resulting both in a significant decline in their physical and/or mental

health and in their developing complex needs well beyond just that of housing.

- 1.6 The most effective way of preventing an individual's experience of "crisis" rough sleeping from developing into a prolonged pattern of "entrenched" rough sleeping is a rapid and comprehensive intervention that results in their immediate short term accommodation needs being met and being assisted with re-establishing themselves in longer term stable accommodation.
- 1.7 Most individuals are likely to rapidly re-establish themselves in stable accommodation in the area with which they are most familiar and have the greatest social ties, the area in which they wield the greatest social capital.
- 1.8 This policy sets out the way in which individuals will be helped to reconnect to other areas, and how we will work with agencies outside Norwich to assist reconnection back to Norwich where appropriate. It is recognised that all reconnections policies should be on a truly two way basis. Full engagement will be required with other areas to assist individuals to reconnect back to Norwich within a structured approach.
- 1.9 Both nationally and locally there is a commitment to reduce the number of rough sleepers. In Norwich, the aim is to reduce and maintain the number as close to zero as possible, but not at the expense of 'passing the problem' to another area. This policy is intended to complement and dovetail with the Greater Norwich Homelessness and Hostel Strategies to use limited resources as effectively as possible to deliver the best possible client focused outcomes.
- 1.10 Urban centres within a rural setting tend to see inward migration of people in search of a wider range of services. Individuals who are homeless or threatened with homelessness are no different in this respect and will move to areas that they perceive to have a greater range of services. There is a body of evidence to show a drift into Norwich in search of accommodation and support services. What is less clear is the extent to which this is offset by migration out of the City.
- 1.11 This policy aims to formalise and ensure consistency in the way many local agencies already apply a local reconnection policy.

## **2 Purpose**

- 2.1 There are five key elements that this policy aims to achieve:
  - to embed the idea of investigating reconnections at all stages of engagement with individuals, not just the early stages
  - to assist rough sleepers, particularly new arrivals, to return in a planned way to an area where they have accommodation, support networks or some other connection in order to provide the best

chance of limiting their experience of social dislocation and promoting their rapid re-establishment in stable accommodation,

- to work with other agencies to help reconnect rough sleepers back to Norwich, where they have the social networks to re-establish sustainable accommodation,
- to avoid the need for people with a local connection to Norwich from having to leave their social networks in order to seek services in other areas, which are not accessible locally, and
- to set out an agreed framework within which a more detailed procedure document can be drafted to allow implementation.

### **3 Aims**

3.1 The aims of the policy are to:

- contribute to an overall reduction in rough sleeping
- reduce the number of people sleeping rough in Norwich to zero or as close to zero as possible
- reconnect rough sleepers to their support networks; back to Norwich from elsewhere, or from Norwich to other areas where more substantial social networks will make it easier to establish sustainable accommodation
- ensure that if vulnerable rough sleepers are referred to other areas, that reasonable assurance is received that sufficient arrangements are in place to prevent those people rough sleeping in those areas
- work with agencies outside Norwich so that suitable support and accommodation is in place before an individual with a local connection returns to Norwich
- in offering accommodation locally, priority is given to clients who are most vulnerable
- actively assist agencies and local authorities when they are working within their own reconnections policies to reconnect their clients to support networks in Norwich where this provides the best opportunity for sustained accommodation
- provide statistical evidence of inward migration to Norwich to assist in the commissioning of services elsewhere in the county

### **4 Legal and strategic frameworks**

4.1 This policy is intended to support the Greater Norwich Homelessness and Hostel Strategies and the wider social inclusion and sustainable communities agendas.

4.2 This policy in no way tries to override any legal requirements or obligations which are placed on any agencies involved in the implementation of this policy, in particular the homelessness duties placed on local authorities. It is up to each agency to make sure that they fulfil any legal requirements which are incumbent upon them.

## **5 Partners**

- 5.1 Norwich City Council and its partners will adopt this policy as a framework for assessing the most suitable location in which rough sleepers should try to re-establish their accommodation. It is only through partnership working that homelessness and rough sleeping can be pro-actively addressed in a coordinated approach.
- 5.2 The message from all accommodation, support and advice agencies working with rough sleepers in Norwich will be clear and consistent: - reconnection will be discussed assertively with all people within the scope of this policy.
- 5.3 The following partners have formally endorsed and support this policy and actively apply the principles in their work with rough sleepers: Advice Service, Supporting People Team, DAAT, Social Services, Health, Police, Probation, voluntary, charity and faith groups.

## **6 Definitions**

- 6.1 **Rough Sleeper** – For the purposes of this policy a rough sleeper is referred to as someone who is rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping. This includes those people who are:
- Rough sleeping on the streets
  - Sofa surfing
  - Squatting
  - Sleeping in tents, cars and other vehicles
  - Sleeping in abandoned buildings or any other accommodation where there is no tenancy
  - Residents of Bishopbridge House
- 6.2 **Local connection** – For the purposes of this policy a local connection to Norwich will be established if an applicant:
- Has resided within Norwich City Council boundary for over six months (this does not include serving in the armed forces, being detained in prison, residence in a bail hostel or institution)
  - if they have permanent employment within the Norwich City Council boundary
  - or if a close relative<sup>1</sup> has been residing in Norwich for more than 5 years.
- 6.3 Time spent in Norwich on bail at John Boag House, in detox, treatment, or rehabilitation where placed by an agency from just outside of Norwich WILL NOT BE considered as having established a connection with the city.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 199 (1) (c) of the Housing Act 1996.

(For those seeking accommodation through the Norwich City Council's Choice Based Lettings Scheme, the local connection requirement is 2 years residence in Norwich, rather than 6 months, unless a housing duty is owed under Homelessness Legislation.)

- 6.4 **Vulnerability-** The vulnerability of each individual will need to be assessed against a range of different criteria, which will be detailed in the procedures document. This will set out an assessment framework within which to assess vulnerability. The framework will allow a more consistent approach across agencies and individuals.

## **7 A Tiered Approach**

- 7.1 Successful facilitation towards someone's positive reconnection involves the participation of local partners and the local authority to which they are to be reconnected.

Five tiers of vulnerability have been identified as:

### **7.2 Tier One – low to no support needs**

A person has left their home area without thinking through the consequences. There is no vulnerability and on reflection the person realises they have made a mistake leaving their home area with insufficient planning/resources and now wishes to return there.

### **7.3 Tier Two – low to medium support needs**

A person who is observed and confirmed to be new to the streets and is verified as having slept rough. Someone for whom a needs led assessment (NLA) is deemed necessary in order to establish individual needs and whether reconnection assistance is the most appropriate action to re-establish stable accommodation.

### **7.4 Tier Three – medium to high support needs**

A person who presents with such an apparent level of need that an extended period of assessment is deemed necessary. This may be for a variety of reasons, including complex needs and high levels of vulnerability.

### **7.5 Tier Four – clients who latently wish to be reconnected to their home area**

A person who having been housed in temporary accommodation, typically a hostel, comes to realise there may be greater opportunity for them to find stable accommodation in their home area or a person who wishes to either re-establish links with or return to their family.

- 7.6 Or someone who is accommodated close to where they previously slept rough, may, once they have re-established a degree of personal stability decide that it is desirable to move away to leave behind their

connections to street culture. This is especially the case for those who have experienced difficulties with substance abuse.

**7.7 Tier Five – clients who are outside the scope of reconnection**

A person who it is established they have high levels of vulnerability but no connection to any other area, where services could be accessed to meet their needs. Broadly speaking this tier encompasses two groups of clients: long term entrenched rough sleepers, and those clients that are homeless and highly transient, regularly moving from one area to another. Both these groups are characterised by their regularly presenting with a multiplicity of need beyond just housing but with an unwillingness to engage with services to address their needs. This makes it particularly important that when these clients do present as willing to engage with services that they receive an immediate response that fully exploits what may be only a tentative engagement.

7.8 As such these clients are outside the scope of the reconnection process and their needs need to be met by the services in Norwich. By the very nature of this client group we would envisage this tier of clients will be relatively small in number but will make high demands on services.

7.9 It is expected that the majority of individuals will fall into Tiers one and two with a marked decline in the number of those falling into the other tiers.

**8 Reconnection**

8.1 Physical reconnection will only be put into practice for people who voluntarily accept the process, and have the capacity to make a reasoned decision about reconnection. The choice of where to live is ultimately down to each individual. It is up to local agencies to clearly explain the services, options and expected outcomes available in Norwich and elsewhere, and the implications of a particular decision. It should be made clear to the client that engaging in this process is an opportunity to secure accommodation and support 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.

8.2 Staff at partner agencies will actively and assertively seek to reconnect clients safely to the supportive networks in their home area based on the needs defined by the five tiers set out above. Where it is appropriate to do so, staff will contact the home authority to advise of the action taken.

8.3 Clients in each of the five tiers will receive the assistance as detailed below. The assistance that can be provided will always be subject to availability. A pragmatic approach will need to be adopted where the most suitable accommodation or services are not immediately available:

**8.4 Tier One**

Offer immediate assistance to return to their home area, if necessary providing means of transport, e.g. a coach ticket. No further access to services is required or offered. Efforts should be made to verify that accommodation and services will be available to an individual on returning to their home area, and that they have arrived safely.

**8.5 Tier Two**

Immediate short term accommodation to be provided in the most appropriate available accommodation. Contact with service providers in the returning area will be made along with confirmation that temporary accommodation and assessment of need will be available on the person's return.

**8.6 Tier Three**

An extended period of assessment is offered. At the end of this process a decision is taken based on the outcome of a needs assessment and a thorough consideration of all suitable service and accommodation options including reconnection. The recommendations of the needs assessment are implemented. If reconnection is to be implemented it is essential that full negotiations have taken place with the service providers in the area where local connections exist.

**8.7 Tier Four**

Once someone in temporary accommodation is identified as wishing to be reconnected back to their home area, the identifying authority shall contact the receiving local authority and negotiate for their return to their home area. If possible this should entail a move to more permanent accommodation. While it will sometimes be relatively straight forward to reconnect someone with and facilitate their return to their nuclear family, it can also be extremely delicate and demand very skilled and time consuming mediation. It may also not present as a possibility until other interventions have been completed, such as interventions for substance misuse and mental health.

**8.8 Tier Five**

Having established that a client falls within tier 5 and that reconnection is inappropriate the identifying authority will offer a full needs assessment to establish the extent of the client's needs and formulate an action plan to address these needs.

**8.9** Clients with no local connection who still wish to remain in Norwich will not be excluded from accessing the full range of local services offered as part of the Council's approach to reducing rough sleeping. However, they must be made aware that the possibility of accessing social housing through the Home Options scheme will be greatly reduced.

## **9 Exceptions**

- 9.1 Regardless of the level of an individual's vulnerability, there are certain other circumstances where reconnection would be inappropriate which would take precedence over the results of the Needs assessment. In the following situations reconnection of clients will not be pursued.
- 9.2 Some clients may have a good connection with another area but may be too vulnerable to make the journey safely or at all.
- 9.3 Some clients may not be able to safely 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.
- 9.4 A return to a previous area may leave some clients at significant risk of returning to substance and/or alcohol misuse. The risk created by renewing associations with previous acquaintances may be sufficient to warrant an exception from the reconnections policy.
- 9.5 Some clients may be prevented from being reconnected to an area with the most significant connection because of an injunction, ASBO or bail conditions. Reconnection will be inappropriate if there are no connections with other areas.
- 9.6 Those who have no identifiable area where they can safely access housing, support and social networks will be provided with access to a full range of homelessness and related services in Norwich or be connected to an area of their choice, subject to the relevant conditions detailed above.
- 9.7 Over recent years the sub-regional working of Norwich City Council, Broadland District Council and South Norfolk Council has been very successful in attracting funding and resources into the Greater Norwich area. This valued partnership working, and the geographical spread of resources and services in the sub-region need to be reflected in this reconnection policy.
- 9.8 Therefore, clients that fall within tiers three and four with a local connection to Broadland District Council or South Norfolk Council will not fall within this policy, due to their higher support needs, and the greater availability of services in Norwich. It is envisaged that initial support will be provided in Norwich, with assistance being provided by Broadland District Council and South Norfolk Council in providing move-on accommodation.
- 9.10 Clients in tiers one and two with a local connection to Broadland District Council or South Norfolk Council will need less support to establish



sustainable accommodations. Therefore, they will be covered by this policy.

- 9.11 Some clients may have an increased chance of sustained accommodation if connections are made with areas that can provide specific support, even if these are not in areas that the client has previously lived. This option should be considered in consultation with the client where it provides a likely option to establish sustainable accommodation.

## **10 Reconnection to Norwich**

- 10.1 The tiered approach outlined above forms the guiding principle when working with agencies outside Norwich who are trying to assist clients to reconnect to their social networks in Norwich.
- 10.2 Agencies from outside Norwich should be encouraged to engage with local services so that sustainable solutions can be found to the housing problems of each presenting individual.

## **11 Monitoring**

- 11.1 All agencies will record details of rough sleepers they engage with. These records will be collated by Norwich City Council to provide statistical analysis of performance. Areas for analysis will include:
- Patterns of rough sleeping locally
  - Positive outcomes for people for whom reconnection was effective
  - Patterns across the five tiers
  - Outcomes for people when reconnection was inappropriate
  - Numbers of rough sleepers returning after reconnection
  - Numbers of people refusing to engage with the process
  - Costs of the policy
- 11.2 Information about individual cases within the local reconnections process may be discussed at the Multi Agency Rough Sleepers Group as an early means to highlight issues in the delivery of the aims of this policy.
- 11.3 Monitoring reports will be circulated to the members of the Greater Norwich Homelessness Prevention Strategy Group and be an agenda item at meetings if requested by members of the group.

## **12 Review**

- 12.1 The policy will be reviewed by all partners after the first six months of operation, and annually thereafter, to make sure that the policy intentions are being delivered. Each review will be based on the statistical information that is gathered. Part of the review will focus on the

monitoring process to make sure that accurate and useful information is available for future reviews.

**13 Policy to practice**

13.1 This document is not intended to be a manual for day-to-day, frontline implementation of the policy. It is important that the principles in this document are clearly translated into procedures that will deliver the policy intentions.

**14 Future Aspirations**

14.1 Appropriate levels of services need to be provided in all areas to avoid the dislocation of individuals from their home areas in search of services to which they have no local access. The monitoring information gathered through this process will be made widely available to help inform commissioning of new services and other solutions to help alleviate gaps in service provision and reduce the need for individuals to move in search of services and support.