

Policy	Reconnections
Relevant Strategy	Homelessness Strategy 2009-12
Department	Community Services
Date	February 2010
Reviews	February 2012

1.0 **Overarching Principles**

1.1 This policy aims to manage the weight of expectation and demand for services from partner agencies assisting us to deliver the Homelessness Strategy. Reference to statistics on demand for services and inward migration serve to illustrate this pressure:

1st April 2008 and 31st March 2009

Cambridge Street Outreach team had contact with 597 new arrivals to the streets of Cambridge of the only one quarter had a local connection to Cambridge City. 236 of these new arrivals were verified as sleeping rough.

SOT successfully reconnected 68 Clients during this period.

1.2 There is a need to create some principles in service delivery that acknowledge the fact that in Cambridge:

- a) This policy is only concerned with clients seeking access to housing services in Cambridge City
- b) The reconnections forum will only consider clients who are requesting access to Housing Services.
- c) Services cannot cope efficiently and effectively with current levels of demand and expanding services is unlikely to meet demand, rather, it will increase demand.
- d) Resources should focus on service users who have an established local connection (see appendix 1 for a local connection definition) with Cambridge. Although the policy will also focus on vulnerable people for whom reconnection is either unavailable or inappropriate.
- e) All clients should be offered the possibility of reconnection, whilst being allowed to access short-term accommodation; consent must be obtained from the client to undertake the reconnections process
- f) It is accepted that some clients may not have established a local connection anywhere and, in this instance, Cambridge City should accept responsibility for service provision.

- g) Where it is established that a client has high levels of vulnerability, is a long term entrenched rough sleeper, or is highly transient, characterized by their regularly presenting at services. Where the clients needs are beyond just housing and where there has been an unwillingness to engage with services to address their needs. It is 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 only be a tentative engagement. As such these clients should have their needs fully assessed and where appropriate met by services in Cambridge City.
- h) Where a client is allowed to access services, they will start to accrue a local connection to Cambridge City from that time.
- i) This policy will not apply to rough sleepers or single homeless persons with out-of area connections. where a local housing authority has accepted a duty to a rough sleeper or single homeless person under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, (although local connections provisions under the homelessness legislation may be relevant).
- j) It is recognised that the level of work required to reconnect clients requires substantial recourses. (Both in staff time and financially)
- k) Where a client has no local connection to Cambridge but can reasonably be reconnected to an area, has low or medium support needs, or does not require support services in Cambridge they will be offered brief, but focused interventions.
- l) Access to Housing Services is dependent on client engagement. The reconnections forum using the client engagement with assessment criteria and the motivation and capacity scoring mechanisms will make decisions on client engagement. See engagement procedure at appendix 3

1.3 This policy has been developed in line with The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) framework on reconnections and key local authority partners have been involved in the review process of the policy.

2.0 Relocation of Service Users

2.1 Service users not locally connected with Cambridge City who display low to medium support needs should ideally be relocated to areas where they have a local connection, where they have formal or informal support networks, or where supply of housing outstrips demand.

2.2 The assessment of someone's local connection status will be made by the service that the client first comes into contact with. That assessment will be based on the criteria set out in the Local Authorities Guidance, and at appendix 1. Where it is required the Housing Options and Advice Team are able to do further checks to confirm local connection.

2.3 When making an assessment the following information should be obtained:

- o Date of birth
- o Age
- o Gender
- o National Insurance Number

- Support Needs (including assessment of physical health, mental health & substance misuse)
 - Housing history (including area of origin, local connection, location of family or support network, places the individual has stayed successfully before, places the client might consider going to where housing stock availability is higher)
 - Reason from coming to Cambridge
 - Risk assessment
- 2.4** The assessment should enable the assessor and client to mutually agree geographic locations and accommodation types for diversion consideration.
- 2.5** Service users should not be reconnected to an area where there is evidence that they will be at risk of physical, sexual or psychological harm should they return.
- 2.6** It may be necessary to consider specific types of provisions such as foyer projects, working communities, wet hostels and so on
- 2.7** 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 is not to be used as a means of travelling the country. Opportunities for reconnection will not be offered to service users on more than one occasion unless agreed by the Reconnections Forum.
- 2.8** The assessing service should secure a bed space before offering a ticket for travel.
- 2.9** The assessing service should encourage the client to contact them to confirm that they have arrived at their destination. Where this does not happen the assessment team will confirm arrival.
- 2.10** Consideration to travelling time must be given when holding a bed space to ensure that the client can get there within the timeframe dictated by the accommodation provider.
- 2.11** Where appropriate clients may be issued with tickets to or accompanied by a member of the team working with the client in order to attend an interview at a project prior to acceptance into that project.
- 2.12** When a client is leaving to take up accommodation in another area tickets should be issued on a one-way basis only.
- 2.13** If the journey is in excess of two hours the agency may provide food and drink for the journey.
- 2.14** Money should not be given to service users except where it is deemed appropriate to do so by the agency facilitating the reconnection.
- 2.15** Confirmation of arrival should be sought from either the client or the accommodation provider.
- 2.16** Where a service user is found to have accommodation that it is reasonable to return to either in Cambridge or elsewhere will be supported in returning to that accommodation immediately, and not allowed to stay in first stage accommodation.

3.0 Reconnections Forum

- 3.1** The City Council's Homeless Services Development Team facilitates the meeting.
- 3.2** The meeting will comprise of the following agencies:
- Street Outreach and Assessment Team (CRI)
 - Assessment Centre (Jimmy's)

- Mental Health Outreach Team (Cyrenians)
- Housing Options and Advice (Cambridge City Council)

3.3 The reconnection forum meets fortnightly and has the following remit:

1. To scrutinise assessments made by frontline agencies on the local connection eligibility of service users, and Interpret the local connection criteria as defined in appendix 1
2. Determine vulnerability in the context of whether it is in the client's best interests to move given Vulnerability, physical or mental health needs In line with Framework at appendix 2.
3. Decide who should be reconnected based on considerations of local connection, vulnerability and availability of appropriate support elsewhere.
4. To agree extensions to periods of stay at the Assessment Centre for non-locally connected service users where reconnection has not been possible in first 28days.
5. To allow access to services in cases where clients cannot be reconnected or have no local connection anywhere, or where a clients best interest will be served by remaining in Cambridge
6. Review initial local connections criteria, where a client has not been reconnected within 2 months of first contact.
7. Determine whether a client is making an effort to 'engage' with services and should continue to receive services on a case-by-case basis.
8. Where appropriate first stage accommodation is not available, allow clients to access temporary beds in hostel accommodation whilst reconnection is facilitated.
9. Where a client is found to have alternative accommodation but is unwilling to return to that accommodation, the forum should make an assessment of how reasonable it is for them to return to that accommodation and apply the guidelines as set out above.
10. Refer appeals against decisions made by the reconnections forum to the city council's Housing Options and Homelessness Manager and a designated voluntary sector representative for a decision
11. Appeals of reconnections decisions should be make in line with the procedural guide.
12. Keep a log of cases where service users could not be reconnected due to inadequate services in the local authority area and report on this via the quarterly homelessness report.
13. Review quarterly reports from assessing services.

4.0 Services to clients

- 4.1 All clients who do not have a local connection to Cambridge City should be encouraged to access first stage accommodation in the City or be diverted back to where they have a local connection.
- 4.2 All clients who do not have a local connection to Cambridge City will be reported to the reconnection forum at the first meeting after their arrival, by the agency that made first contact.
- 4.3 If a client is reconnected without being accommodated in first stage accommodation the agency that does the reconnection will report this to the fortnightly reconnections forum.

- 4.3 If the individual cannot be relocated the case will be referred back to the reconnections forum for consideration
- 4.4 If the failure to reconnect is viewed by the reconnections forum to be the result of lack of willingness to engage by the client or refusal of more than one reconnection option then s/he will be asked to leave the accommodation they are in.
- 4.5 Engagement will be based on the clients motivation and capacity to engage, as detailed in appendix 2 Defining engagement and capacity
- 4.6 Clients who are deemed by the reconnections forum to be vulnerable or chaotic, and where reconnection would not serve their best interest can be allowed to access services in Cambridge.
- 4.8 If a client is already housed elsewhere access to the accommodation should normally be denied unless the individual presents as vulnerable or is fleeing violence, in which case they would be allowed access to accommodation pending fuller investigation of their circumstances
- 4.9 All referrals to designated units should be made via the Allocations and Resettlement Planning meeting (A&R) or the Joint Allocation Panel (JAP)

6.0 Services to those under 21

- 6.1 In general service users under 21 should be discouraged from accessing services traditionally designed for rough sleepers or those engaging in a street-based lifestyle
- 6.2 Clients who are Under 21 should be signposted to Centre 33, Connexions or the Housing Options and Advice Centre at the earliest opportunity.
- 6.3 Service users under the age of 21 needing to access the front line services should be fast-tracked for assessment and prioritised above their older peers.
- 6.4 All 16 and 17 year olds must be referred to Social Services for assessment, or the Out of Hours emergency number.
- 6.5 All referrals to designated units should be made via the Joint Allocation Panel (JAP) or the Allocations and Resettlement Planning meeting (A&R),

7.0 Outcomes

- 7.1 Statistics will be collected for the following areas:
- Number of new arrivals per quarter on the streets of Cambridge
 - Average number of rough sleepers found on quarterly street counts
 - Number of approaches for accommodation at the Assessment Centre
 - Number of successful reconnections established
 - Percentage of clients reconnected who return to Cambridge
 - Numbers of cases where reconnection was required but not possible due to lack of provision in another local authority area
 - Quarterly inward migration to Cambridge.