Reconnection Protocol

November 2015 – April 2017
1 Purpose

The purpose of the Reconnection Protocol is to:

a) Actively reconnect individuals without a local connection who are at risk of rough sleeping or are rough sleeping, in a planned way to an area where they have accommodation, support networks or some other connection.

b) Prioritise access to all Supporting People funded services in Bedford for those who have a local connection to Bedford.

Aims

The aims of the protocol are to:

- Reduce the number of people sleeping rough in Bedford
- Reconnect rough sleepers to their supportive networks, outside of Bedford
- Ensure that if rough sleepers are referred to other areas, reasonable assurance is received and sufficient arrangements are in place to prevent rough sleeping in those areas
- Ensure that Bedford’s services assist all rough sleepers, including those vulnerable people for whom reconnection is either unavailable or inappropriate

2 Legal and strategic frameworks

This Reconnections Protocol will support and be consistent with the following strategies, policies and duties:

- Bedford Borough Council’s Housing Strategy and Homelessness Strategy
- Bedford Borough Council’s Supporting People Strategy
- ‘Getting Connected’, the Department of Communities and Local Governments guidelines for operating reconnections policies for rough sleepers
- ‘Vision to end rough sleeping – No Second Night Out Nationwide’ Department of Communities & Local Government July 2011

The Protocol does not seek to override any legal requirements or obligations placed on any agencies involved in its implementation. In particular, where a local housing authority has accepted a duty to re-house an individual under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, the Reconnections Protocol will not be applied.

4 Services and Partners
Bedford Borough Council expects agencies delivering services to homeless people to work closely to assist the reconnection process and help people to accommodation and support in areas where individuals have networks and access to housing/support.

Supporting People contracts require providers to comply with the principles and procedures of the Reconnections Protocol.

Agencies are encouraged to work in the spirit of this Protocol to actively discourage rough sleeping and a street lifestyle in Bedford.

5 Putting the Protocol into practice

Introduction

The Council’s Strategic Housing Needs Service will lead on the training issues related to this protocol. Any updates of this protocol will be issued to all relevant parties and briefing sessions will be arranged for providers as required to ensure that all front line staff are up to date with the requirements.

In accordance with the principles behind the purpose of the Protocol it will be implemented in accordance with the following procedures:

Establishing Local Connection

In order to access any Supporting People funded accommodation service a person must be able to provide information and evidence that provides proof that they have a local connection to Bedford. The three accommodation based services that are excluded from the local connection requirement within this protocol are:

i) ‘The Nightshelter’ 50 Clarendon Street Bedford - to enable facilitating of the reconnections process

ii) Bedford Women’s Refuge - open access to this service is required in order to safely accommodate households with no local connection to Bedford who are fleeing domestic violence.

iii) Santosh Asian Women’s Refuge Bedford - open access to this service is required in order to safely accommodate households with no local connection to Bedford who are fleeing domestic violence.

For the purposes of this Protocol local connection to Bedford will be established if the client meets any one of the following:

Residence

The person currently lives in the area in settled accommodation and have done so for not less than six months in the last twelve or three years in the last five.

Settled accommodation does not include, for example, Bed & Breakfast, staying temporarily with family or friends or staying at Bedford Nightshelter.

Employment
The person has permanent employment in the area excluding casual work.

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

**Family Association**

The person has close family resident in Bedford. Close family means: Mother, Father, Brother, Sister, Adult Son or Daughter whom they wish to be near and who live in the area and have done so for at least the last five years.

Establishing local connection will form the initial part of the assessment process undertaken by local agencies working with rough sleepers and single homeless people.

Rough Sleepers who are assessed as having a local connection with Bedford will be entitled to stay in Supporting People funded supported housing or a short stay at “The Nightshelter” until they are ready to move on to more independent living. The individual’s pathway to appropriate resettlement will form part of their initial assessment carried out by the local agencies.

**Exceptions to the Local Connection criteria:**

The Protocol acknowledges that there are exceptions to the local connection criteria. Exceptional cases will be determined on a case-by-case basis and all such cases need to be referred to the Council’s Re-housing Team Leader (01234 718638) who, will decide whether the circumstances of the client are deemed appropriate to constitute an exception.

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.

i) 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 Bedford.

ii) 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 as per the 2012 Home Office definition\(^1\) or other violence by persons not associated with the client for example; racial violence.

iii) Where a client is considered too vulnerable to return to their identifiable area of connection. Such decisions will be made in consultation with all lead professionals involved in the client’s case, specifically health and mental health homelessness services.

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\(^1\) "Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender and sexuality. This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse; Psychological, Physical, Sexual, Financial, Emotional. The definition includes so called ‘honour based’ violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage, and is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group.” For more information please visit [https://www.gov.uk/domestic-violence-and-abuse](https://www.gov.uk/domestic-violence-and-abuse)
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 Re-housing Team Leader 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. Evidence to explain why Bedford is the most suitable area of placement will be required.

Where it is agreed by the Re-housing Team Leader that a client qualifies for exemption from local connection rules the client will be assessed according to the resettlement pathways assessment at appendix 1 and appropriate resettlement support applied.

Where the client is seeking access to Supporting People funded services, the Re-Housing Team Leader will also ensure that the Supported Housing Team are informed of the exception so that this can be noted in relation to any subsequent referrals for these clients.

**Referral Mechanism**

The sections below explain the procedures for reconnecting those who have been assessed as not having a local connection to Bedford, and have not been considered as an exception.

Where a client is assessed as having no local connection to Bedford, are not exempt from being reconnected and have a proven link to another area to which they can safely be expected to return, the client should be referred to Bedford Borough Council’s Reconnection Officer. Referrals will be accepted from any agencies by completing the Help for Single Homeless Referral Form.

Completed referral forms can be submitted via the following methods:

**email** - rehousing_team@bedford.gov.uk

**post or hand delivery** - Bedford Borough Council Rehousing Team 6th Floor, Borough Hall Cauldwell Street Bedford MK42 9AP

Consent for reconnection must 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.

**Reconnection Assessment**

Upon receipt of the referral the Reconnection Officer will commence an assessment of the clients reconnection needs. The assessment will be led by the Reconnection Officer in consultation with any other agencies and/or professionals involved in the client’s case, such as health, mental health and homelessness services, to ensure that the client’s needs are established as part of the reconnection process.

Clients with no local connection and no recourse to public funds should still be referred. The Reconnection Officer will work with other local agencies and services to facilitate reconnection where possible.
To facilitate the reconnections process, clients who have recourse to public funds will be permitted a maximum stay of 14 nights at The Nightshelter 50 Clarendon Street Bedford subject to availability of bed spaces and The Nightshelter’s own admission policy.

There will be flexibility to extend this maximum stay on an individual basis and a decision will be made in consultation with Bedford Borough Council’s Reconnection Officer and The Nightshelter.

If a client fails to engage with the Reconnection process for example; fails to attend meetings or fails to provide relevant information required to find a suitable reconnection or other solution to end their homelessness, services will be withdrawn including their entitlement to access The Nightshelter. Any stay already in place will end.

For those without a local connection who have previously been successfully reconnected elsewhere but return to Bedford at a later date, following their Reconnection accommodation ending as a result of a breach of tenancy / licence or other arrangement, will not be entitled to access services in Bedford including reconnection.

All those who have a local connection outside of Bedford will aim to be appropriately reconnected to an area where they have support networks.

Bedford Borough Council’s Reconnection Service will be the principle organisation 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 reconnection protocol by encouraging the client to engage in the reconnection process.

The assessment of housing and support needs should enable the Reconnection Officer and client to mutually agree geographic locations and accommodation types for reconnection.

As part of the reconnection process, the Reconnection Officer will endeavor to obtain direct confirmation that there will be some form of accommodation (and other services where relevant) available for the client on arrival and an appointment should be made with a key worker wherever possible. This is to prevent the client rough sleeping in that area and is especially important for people who may be vulnerable to some degree. This should involve making contact with the relevant Local Authority to encourage them to address their duty to the individual.

The Reconnection Officer will be responsible for funding and arranging the necessary travel arrangements and where possible, accompany the client to the train/bus station.

The Reconnection Officer will issue a Reconnection Offer letter to the client at the point a suitable solution to reconnect has been confirmed. See example - appendix 1.

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

The Reconnection Officer 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.

Refusal of the offer
Where a genuine offer of a reconnection is made to a client but they refuse to be reconnected they will not be able to access Supporting People funded accommodation and The Nightshelter.

A genuine offer must be to an identifiable area where they can access housing, support and social networks.

However, if the client still wishes to remain in Bedford, they will be able to access local services offered as part of the Council’s strategy towards rough sleeping as follows;

- Advice only from Street Outreach Support Services.
- Advice from Bedford Borough Council’s Housing Options Service
- Meals and Services at Prebend Day Centre.
- Access to The Salvation Army Cold Weather shelter when temperatures are predicted to be below zero for three or more consecutive nights.
- Access to general health services including the nurse at Prebend Day Centre and GP service at 2 Goldington Road Bedford.

A Reconnection Refusal letter will be issued to the client by the Reconnection Officer and copied to The Nightshelter and Bedford Borough Council’s Supported Housing Team. See example - Appendix 2.

No Reconnection Options

Bedford Borough Council’s Reconnection Officer will monitor and record data which will capture details of individuals who are assessed as having no local connection to Bedford, are engaging with the Reconnection process but where no suitable Reconnection offer can be found.

The Reconnection Officer will signpost these individuals to partners and agencies to assist with finding other solutions to end the individuals homelessness.

9 Monitoring

The operation and outcomes of the Reconnections Protocol will be monitored by Bedford Borough Council.

10 Complaints and Queries

Any queries or complaints regarding decisions on individual cases should refer to the Council’s Rehousing Team Leader by email: tabitha.resta@bedford.gov.uk post: Borough Hall 6th Floor Cauldwell Street Bedford MK42 9AP phone: 01234 718638.
Dear Name,

Reconnection Offer to end Homelessness

We are writing to confirm our offer of a solution to end your homelessness.

This offer is being made as part of the Government’s Nationwide Vision to end Rough Sleeping (No Second Night Out Nationwide July 2011) and Bedford Borough Council’s Reconnection Protocol November 2015 – March 2017. This offer is the only one Bedford Borough Council will make to you.

We are pleased to advise you that as a result of the support offered by the Bedford Borough Council’s Reconnection Officer, a reconnection package has been arranged to enable you to resettled in an area where you have a connection.

Accommodation has been arranged for you at address. This is (delete as appropriate) a Private Sector Tenancy / Supported Housing / Accommodation with family or friends / Lodgings / a Housing Association or Council tenancy. This accommodation is being provided by (complete & delete as appropriate) a private sector landlord name / Supported Accommodation provider name / Social landlord or local authority name / name of family member or friend / licensor name. Your tenancy / licence starts on date.

The rent being charged / other services charges for this accommodation is £amount weekly (£amount monthly). Based on the information you have provided about your financial circumstances, I am satisfied this accommodation is affordable for you. If you are not working or living on a low income you are entitled to claim Housing Benefit from name of local authority to help you pay the rent.

To access and settle into the accommodation you need to input detail of appointments to sign tenancy / licence agreements. Include times and location of meetings. Detail arrangements to pay rent, how and where to claim housing benefit. Add anything else relevant.
You have been provided with a bus ticket / train ticket / taxi to enable you to travel to detail destination in order to access this accommodation. Name from agency will travel with you to help and support you with making these first steps to resettling. Name will meet you to start the journey at time on date at place.

To help you settle into and sustain this accommodation support will be provided by name of support provider. This support will help you detail type of support offered. To contact your support provider you need to detail contact detail and contact arrangements.

Resettling and rebuilding your life after being homeless and sleeping rough can be difficult therefore it is very important that you engage with the support being offered. If you don’t you may be at risk of losing this accommodation and becoming homeless again.

If you choose to not accept this one offer and continue sleeping rough in Bedford your eligibility to access Homelessness Services and Support will be limited to:

- Advice only from Street Outreach Support Services
- Advice from Bedford Borough Council’s Housing Options Service
- Meals and Services at Prebend Day Centre
- Access to The Salvation Army Cold Weather shelter when temperatures are predicted to be below zero for three or more consecutive nights.
- Access to general health services including the nurse at Prebend Day Centre and GP service at 2 Goldington Road Bedford.

If you need to discuss anything about this letter please do not hesitate to contact us on 01234 718684.

On behalf of the Bedford Borough Council I wish you all the best for your move into your new accommodation.

Yours sincerely

Name
Position
Dear Name,

**Reconnection Offer refusal – Withdrawal of Access to Services in Bedford**

We wrote to you on offering a solution to end your homelessness. This solution was by way of an offer of accommodation at [address] with support provided by [detail support offered]. I am satisfied that there is nothing which would make this offer unreasonable for you to accept and our offer letter made it clear to you what the consequence would be if you refused it.

You have chosen to refuse this offer.

As a result of you choosing to not accept the offer and continue sleeping rough in Bedford your entitlement to access Homelessness Services and Support has been limited to:

- Advice only from Street Outreach Support Services contact details
- Advice from Bedford Borough Council’s Housing Options Service contactable on 01234 718058
- Meals and Services at Prebend Day Centre Prebend Street Bedford
- Access to The Salvation Army Cold Weather shelter Congress Hall Commercial Road Bedford when temperatures are predicted to be below zero for three or more consecutive nights.
- Access to general health services including the nurse at Prebend Day Centre and GP service at 2 Goldington Road Bedford.

This one offer was made as part of the Government’s Nationwide Vision to end Rough Sleeping (No Second Night Out Nationwide July 2011) and Bedford Borough Council’s Reconnection Protocol November 2015 – March 2017.

If you need to discuss anything about this letter please do not hesitate to contact me on number.

Yours sincerely

**Name**

**Position**