

Housing Services Reconnection Policy

Reconnecting rough sleepers to their local community to access housing and support services

2016



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Housing Services

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Glossary of terms

New rough sleeper / new arrival is a rough sleeper who has been in the district for more than one night but less than 6 months.

Entrenched rough sleeper is a person who has slept rough in the district for more than 6 months.

Returning rough sleeper is a person helped off the streets but for whatever reason has returned to the streets to sleep.

Reconnection offer (or single service offer) is an offer made to a rough sleeper of accommodation and support in an area with which they have a local connection (based on an assessment of their needs).

Task and Targeting is an operational multi-agency group to discuss and action plan to reduce rough sleeping.

Introduction

This policy aims to reduce rough sleeping as part of a national strategy called No Second Night Out (NSNO). NSNO is a response to rough sleeping which makes sure people are helped off the streets quickly, that nobody lives on the streets and that once helped they do not return to the streets. Rapid identification and reconnection of rough sleepers is an important harm reduction measure, ending homelessness before a person's situation deteriorates further.

Part of the principles of NSNO is to operate a reconnection policy which aims to reconnect rough sleepers, particularly new arrivals to their local community to access housing and support services.

Policy aims and objectives

The principal aims of the policy are:

- To share in cross-authority work to tackle and prevent homelessness
- To reduce rough sleeping in the district through a locally agreed, client-centred, assertive resettlement process
- To have consensus at the local level with key stakeholders, and where appropriate, regional or national stakeholders, to ensure a robust agreed mechanism to refer people to a place where they have formal or informal support networks.

Housing Services will offer guidance and direction to agencies working and interpreting the policy. The policy will be reviewed by Housing Services every two years.

Statistics

Rough sleeper counts

Rough sleeper estimates can give an indication of the relative extent of rough sleeping in the district. Figures 1 and 2 show the rough sleeping estimates locally and regionally.

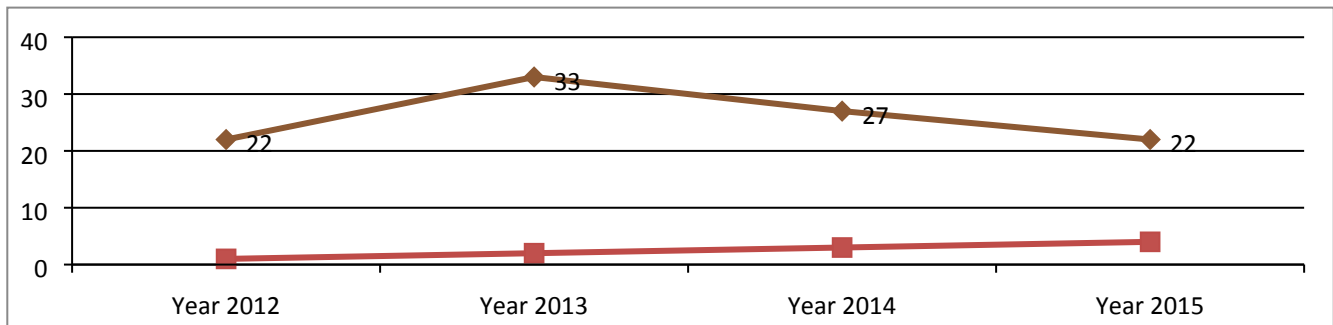


Figure 1: Rough sleeper estimates for the last four years in B&NES

(Note: Count Methodology Changed in 2012 hence previous figures are not comparable).

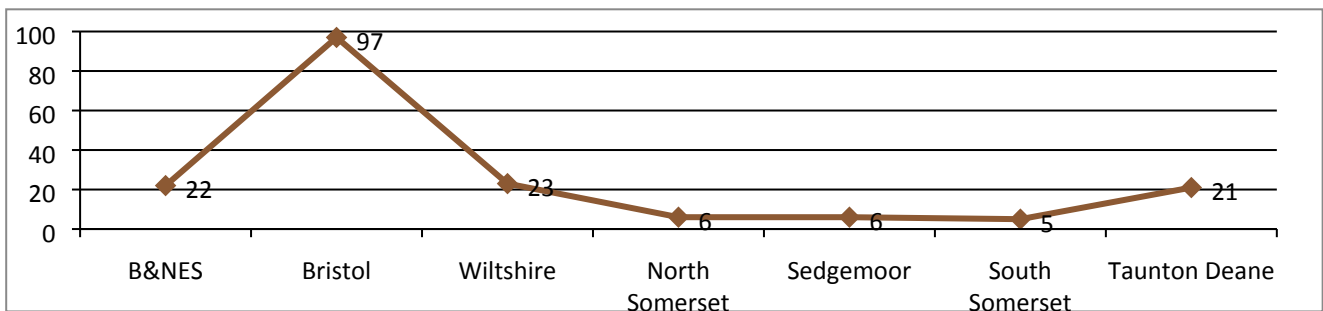


Figure 2: Street counts and estimates of rough sleeping in 2015 by region.

Rough sleeper estimate 2015

On the night of the estimate the Manvers Street Hostel was fully occupied and it was estimated that 22 people were sleeping rough. Of those people:

- 10 did not have a local connection
- 19 were known to the outreach services, were identified by name and had been offered support and services
- 3 had their own tenancies but had chosen not to occupy them
- 1 was ex-military
- 5 had been identified in the 2014 estimate were included in the 2015 estimate of 22.

Severe weather emergency protocol

The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) prevents winter deaths amongst rough sleepers by providing additional emergency shelter. It is triggered by three consecutive nights of sub-zero temperatures or other extreme weather. During 24 nights when the SWEP was operational a total of 78 people stayed at Manvers Street Hostel. Figure 3 shows their local connection and support needs.

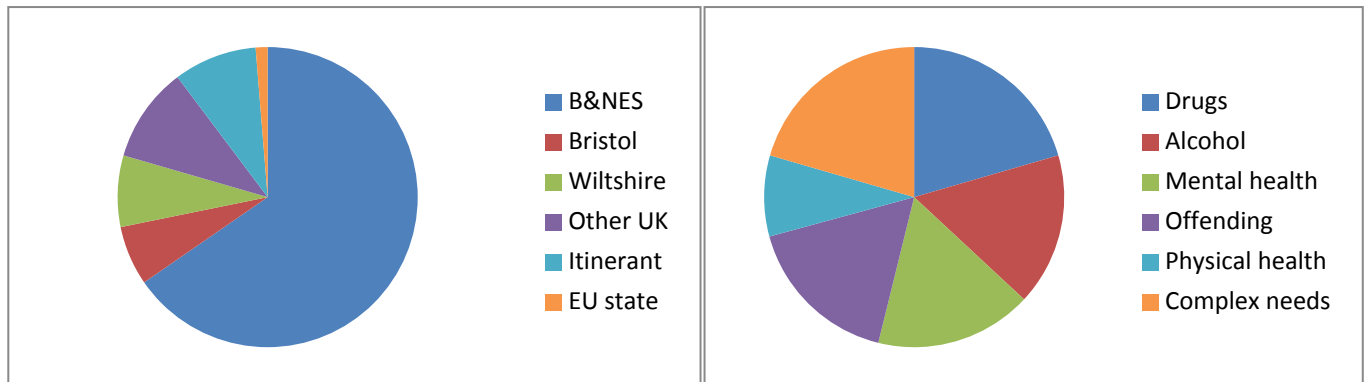


Figure 3: Local connection and support needs of people accessing Julian House during the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol

Number and cost of reconnections

Housing Services helped Julian House reconnect 19 people in 2014, 16 people in 2015 and so far 13 in 2016. The direct cost was £2050 which was on average £43 per person.

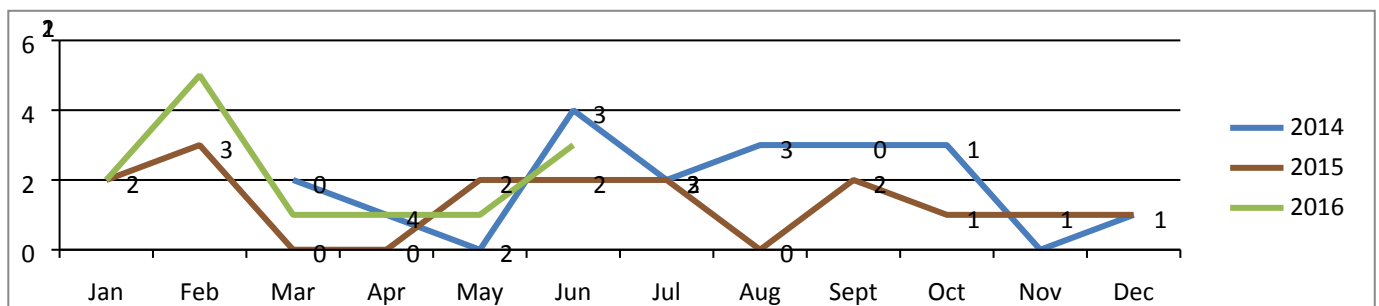


Figure 4: Number of reconnections

Housing and support need assessment

People identified as at serious risk of, or who are currently sleeping rough in Bath and North East Somerset will have a Housing and Support Need Assessment. The assessment will be conducted by staff working for Julian House, Reach or Housing Services.

The assessment will identify the areas where the person has a connection, their immigration status and entitlement to benefits, their housing history, medical and social problems and if necessary an assessment of their risk to themselves or others. Third party information about

the person can support a reconnection decision, such as information from a GP, hospital, local authority or support providers. Signed authorisation to share information will need to be sought from the person as part of the assessment process although risk management procedures may apply in some circumstances and not require consent.

People who do not have a local connection with Bath and North East Somerset will be found accommodation and support in an area where they have a connection.

The following exceptions apply in referring people to an area they hold a local connection:

- Where it is unsafe for the person to return to the area because of a risk of violence either domestic or otherwise or because of severe or significant harassment, racial or otherwise
- Where the person is subject to an Criminal Behaviour Order or other Order which restricts their return to the entire area
- Where Housing Services have accepted a duty towards a person under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996
- Where the person does not have a connection anywhere
- A person is under the age of 18

Local connection

A person can have a local connection with Bath and North East Somerset through residency, employment, family association or for a special reason. Only one of the four circumstances is required for a person to establish a local connection and each case must be considered on its own particular facts.

The prescribed list of local connection circumstances are:

Residency	• The person is, or was in the past, normally resident in the district (at least 6 months out of the last 12 months or 3 out of the last 5 years) and his or her residence is, or was, of his or her own choice.
Employment	• The person has stable or permanent employment in the district
Family	• The person has a connection with the district through family associations
Special reasons	• Special reasons or circumstances which are significant will be considered on an individual basis

A local connection for reasons that are not included in the prescribed list of circumstances will be irrelevant, for example, being born in the district or having a general practitioner or engaging in support in the district will not prove a local connection.

Establishing a local connection

This policy defines **normal residence** as being the place where at the relevant time (the time when their housing and support needs are being assessed) the person in fact resides.

The **place** of residence does not need to be a permanent home, or even to be the place where a person most wants to be living, but it must be the place that the person has chosen to eat, sleep and reside:

- Living with friends and family may establish a local connection, but the person must normally eat, sleep and reside in the home of the friends and family.
- Sleeping on a park bench or in a shop doorway would not establish a local connection since it is not considered to be a place where a person can reside.
- Casual and unplanned arrangements would not establish a local connection as they are not considered to be normal residence.
- Premises approved for prisoners released on licence can be considered as normal residency if they are not subject to a condition (a lack of choice) to occupy the approved premise. Other examples of where residency would not be of an applicant's choice include where a person is detained under the authority of an act of parliament, such as custody, custodial sentence or detained under the Mental Health Act 1983.

Family associations can include having parents, brothers, sisters or children living in the district but would not normally extend beyond these relationships unless the circumstances are special.

Special reasons must not be minor in nature. An example of a special circumstance would be when a person was receiving medical treatment in the district which was not available elsewhere in the country, and commuting was not a reasonable option.

Emergency accommodation

Julian House provides 29 emergency beds for rough sleepers, 20 of those beds are in the Manvers Street Hostel and 9 are move-on beds in shared housing at Corn Street.

People accepted as having a connection with Bath and North East Somerset

A person with a local connection to the district will be entitled to use the facilities at Manvers Street until they have other accommodation available to them. The person's conduct will be subject to the hostel's terms and conditions.

A person will be supported to explore other housing options in the district to enable them to move on from the hostel.

People not accepted as having a local connection with Bath and North East Somerset:

A person without a local connection to the district will be considered for accommodation and support in a local authority area where they have a connection. They will be made a reconnection offer also known as a Single Service Offer. If a person has more than one local connection the first consideration will be given to the applicant's preferred area although availability will be a critical factor.

Manvers Street hostel and services will be available for up to 21 days whilst the person is being reconnected. Extensions to the 21 days period should be referred to Task and Targeting.

Accommodation during periods of severe weather

Regardless of local connection, a person will be entitled to occupy the Manvers Street hostel during periods of severe weather. Severe weather is categorised as when the night time temperature is forecast to be at zero or below for three or more consecutive nights.

Supported people funded accommodation services

Resources within the district will be prioritised for homeless people who have a local connection with Bath and North East Somerset.

A person who does not have a local connection to Bath and North East Somerset but does elsewhere, or who has been resistant or refuses the process of reconnection should not be given priority to Supporting People funded accommodation services above people who either have a local connection with Bath and North East Somerset or have no local connection anywhere.

Reconnection offer (also known as a Single Service Offer)

The Single Service Offer provides a homeless person with an offer of accommodation and support. It will be available for them to accept immediately or at the present time and not at some point in the future.

The accommodation will be reasonable for the person to accept. To decide if the property is reasonable regard should be given to the physical characteristics of the accommodation, the affordability of the rent and charges, any risk of violence, threats of violence or harassment if the person was to accept the offer.

If a person is offered reasonable accommodation in a district of an authority where he has a local connection, the services and accommodation available at Manvers Street Hostel will be withdrawn. People who decide to refuse the offer will be encouraged to reconsider their decision and will be supported in doing so by the Outreach Team.

If a person is offered accommodation in an area where he/she does not have a local connection, perhaps in an area where supply outstrips demand, it is reasonable for the person to refuse the offer of accommodation without the fear of Manvers Street services being withdrawn.

People who refuse to participate with the reconnection process

A person, who refuses to participate with the process or is deliberately and repeatedly resistant or returns to the district after being reconnected will have the services of Manvers Street withdrawn. The decision to withdraw the services of Manvers Street will be made by Julian House.

Before withdrawing services, a referral will be made to Task and Targeting. A multi-agency response can support a reconnection offer and reduce the chances of the offer being refused. The membership working with the rough sleeper will be aware of the reconnection offer and be in a position to repeat the same offer and ensure that the person knows that another agency does not have a better offer, manage their unrealistic expectations about their housing options and advise them about the risks of rough sleeping.

People returning to the district after being reconnected

If a person has been reconnected and returns to Bath and North East Somerset attempting to access services an assessment will take place to identify any change in their circumstances.

If it is considered that the person's circumstances are substantially the same they will be viewed as disengaged and access to the Manvers Street hostel will not be available, with the exception of street outreach services.

If the person's situation is not substantially the same as before, the reconnection policy should recommence.

People who are reconnected to Bath and North East Somerset

Referrals to Bath and North East Somerset will be accepted for people who meet the eligibility criteria of this policy and the reconnection policy of the referring authority.

People who are accepted as having a local connection with Bath and North East Somerset will be included on the waiting list for a bed space at the Manvers Street hostel. The allocation of bed spaces will primarily be considered on a needs basis.

People from abroad

People from abroad who are rough sleeping will be supported to return to their home country.

Support can include help to obtain passport, travel documents, travel expenses, information on housing and support services and making contact with their family members.

The website www.routeshome.org.uk and www.homeless.org.uk can be consulted in this regard as well as the local engagement team at Portishead Immigration Enforcement.

Appeals and exceptional cases

Bath and North East Somerset's Task and Targeting Group meet monthly and have the role of providing a partnership response to addressing rough sleeping and negative street activity across the district. Part of their role is to ensure that the Reconnection Policy is being applied correctly.

Task and Targeting will as required:

- Review non-urgent appeals made by an applicant
- Consider exceptional or special circumstances which do not fit within this policy
- Ensure that this policy does not cause an increase in the numbers of rough sleepers
- Promote awareness of the reconnection policy and liaise with other local authorities or organisations where it is felt that their services are having a negative effect on this policy.
- Review the monitoring information and ensure that the policy is non-discriminatory and takes into account equality issues.
- Consider requests to extend the period of stay at Manvers Street hostel and grant permission where there is good reason.

Decisions should be made wherever possible within 33 days. Where agreement cannot be reached by Task and Targeting, the views of the membership will be referred to Housing Services and Julian House (as the provider of accommodation) for a decision.

Urgent appeals and decisions will be made by Housing Services, in partnership with Julian House.

An applicant who feels they have been treated unfairly can make a complaint via the relevant organisation's complaints procedure.

Complaints about this policy will be referred to Housing Services.

Condition of use

The following criteria must be adhered to:

- This policy is not an opportunity for a homeless person to travel the country
- Any tickets purchased should be issued on the basis of one way travel
- A bed space must be secured in the accepting area before offering a ticket for travel
- Money should not be given direct to a homeless person
- This policy will not repeatedly fund expenses for the same homeless person. Any request for funding for the same homeless person should be approved by Housing Services.

Monitoring and audit

Monitoring information will be collected by Julian House and Reach on a continuing basis and reported to Task and Targeting. The information collected will be shared with the Homeless Partnership Core Group and can be shared with the wider community via the Council's website. The following information will be collected:

- The number of new arrivals
- The number of rough sleepers identified and profile of those rough sleeping
- The number of approaches for accommodation at the night shelter
- The number of successful reconnections
- The number of people returning to Bath and North East Somerset following reconnection
- The number of people refusing to participate
- The number of cases where reconnection was required but not possible due to a lack of provision in another local authority area.
- The number of people reconnected to Bath and North East Somerset from other local authority areas.
- Where the person has come from and the reason for leaving.
- Patterns of rough sleeping
- The cost of the policy.

Task and Targeting will monitor people between 18 and 21 who are considered through the reconnection policy.

Equal opportunities

We are committed to promoting equality of opportunity in delivering services. We aim to treat each applicant fairly and equally regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, age, religion, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, colour or political affiliation.

Table of authorities

CLG: Vision to end rough sleeping: No Second Night Out Nationwide in July 2011

Homeless Link: NSNO across England 2014

Homeless Link: Assessment & Reconnection Toolkit: Good practice guidance for homelessness services 2014

Bath and North East Somerset Homeless Strategy

Avon and Somerset Partnership Group¹ Reconnection Policy / Agreement 2012

¹ Local authority areas of Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset, Sedgemoor, South Somerset, Mendip, Taunton Deane, Bristol and West Somerset