# GLOUCESTERSHIRE RECONNECTION POLICY

**Joint Agreement between Gloucestershire Supporting People and Gloucestershire Districts and Boroughs**

1. **Background**
   1. The reconnection policy has been developed in partnership by the Supporting People Core Strategy Group. It has been guided by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) reconnection framework.
   2. The government’s Rough Sleeper Strategy ‘No one Left Out’ (November 2008) recognised the importance of Reconnections Policies in reducing rough sleeping by encouraging people to access support, health and accommodation services where they have such networks.
   3. Supportive networks increase opportunities for people to move away from homelessness as most individuals are likely to re-establish themselves in stable accommodation in the area with which they are most familiar and have the greatest social ties.
2. **Context within which policy operates**

2.1 The local Reconnection Policy has been developed to improve access to Supporting People funded services for vulnerable and homeless individuals and support those without local connection wishing to seek accommodation in an area where they have such connections and supportive networks.

* 1. The Policy will ensure that Supporting People funded services meet the local eligibility and priority conditions as contained in the revised Supporting People contracts to be agreed to by the Partnership Board in readiness for recommissioning accommodation based services under the Gloucestershire Supporting People Strategy 2011-2015.
  2. Providers of Supporting People funded services should promote equal access to services in line with local policy and the Quality Assessment Framework Objective C 1.6: ‘Fair access, diversity and inclusion’. *Service providers must not restrict services to those meeting statutory eligibility criteria for service provision or impose blanket exclusions on groups of people without local connection to access short-term services that are eligible to receive Supporting People grant.*
  3. Short–term services (up to two years of duration) should not operate a Local Connection Policy that excludes people who come from outside Gloucestershire or from a different district or borough council within Gloucestershire. The Partnership Board continues to subscribe to the previous Grant Conditions which stated: *‘an Administering Authority shall ensure fair and open access to appropriate and strategically relevant Supporting People services, without prejudice to the operation of any reconnection policy that it has developed, in respect of short–term services shall not take account whether that applicant has a local connection to the area covered by the Administering Authority’.* The local connection considerations not to be applied are those as given in Section 199 of the Housing Act 1996 which defines ‘local connection’ thus: a person normally resident in a district of a Local Authority and that residence is or was the person’s own choice, a person employed there, a person has family there, or there are special circumstances.
  4. Whilst Local Authorities endeavour to meet local needs in support services available in their own areas, due to lack of resources and the historical distribution of accommodation based services this is not always possible. Providing equal access has implications for move–on opportunities for individuals in Supporting People services not normally resident in the district where the service is delivered. Offering permanent move–on irrespective of a local connection is unsustainable in the face of local demand exceeding supply for social housing. In order to improve the through-put in Supporting People funded schemes, joint agreements for, or a process of move–on, need to be in place for accepted service users for a whole range of housing options.

1. **Principles of the policy**
   1. The fundamental principles underlying this Policy are that:

1) It is undesirable and unsafe for newly homeless individuals to sleep rough, putting themselves in immediate danger of significant harm, and in the longer term at risk of entrenchment in a street homelessness life with all its damaging consequences.

2) It is desirable to limit individuals’ experience of social dislocation by constructively linking them back to, or supporting them in, areas where they had sustained attachment to a local community because social networks increase opportunities for people to move away from homelessness.

1. **What do we mean by Reconnection?**

4.1 Under this Policy, there are two key elements to the meaning of ‘Reconnection’:

* Tackling the social exclusion of vulnerable homeless people whereby they have become marginalised and excluded from social networks such as family, neighbourhood and community, and opportunities, choices and life chances available to the majority of people.
* Encouraging and supporting vulnerable homeless people, to physically relocate to communities in areas where they have built up sustained attachments. Many vulnerable homeless people access supported accommodation in areas that are not local to them.
  1. ‘Local area’ is not necessarily where a person originates from but where they have most recently had sustained attachments to a local community.

4.3 Support activities related to both understandings of ‘reconnection’ are part of housing-related support activities funded under Supporting People. It is the responsibility of service providers to provide support to facilitate service users to connect and reconnect to social networks and to access resources such as health, education and employment.

**5.0 Purpose and aims of this policy**

* 1. To ensure equitable arrangements exist for vulnerable individuals to receive the support they need to tackle and prevent homelessness.
  2. Maximise resources across Gloucestershire to enable homeless and vulnerable people to have equal access to short-term accommodation based services, whilst ensuring arrangements exist to enable a return to an area where they have a social support network or some other connection so that they may live independently or with longer term services in that area.
  3. To provide a mechanism to enable housing authorities to take a long-term view to assisting applicants by giving consideration to how a household placed in supported accommodation will be housed once their short-term housing comes to an end. This will be addressed by using a range of housing options. In doing so the Policy will help to improve through-put in schemes by enabling a larger number of local housing authorities to share the responsibility of moving households on from the limited numbers of supported accommodation spaces.

5.4 To ensure responsibility for housing is met proportionately across the districts with reciprocal arrangements in place with the referring authority, for those who remain in the new host area.

5.5 Where individuals have no definable connection within any Gloucestershire district or are unable to return there due to special circumstances, they should have access to local services in the district/borough they present to. Such individuals may include vulnerable Ex-Offenders unable to return to their areas of origin.

**6.0 Reasons for the application of the policy**

6.1 Authorities are expected to provide for the needs of all service users ordinarily resident in their areas; however the absence of suitable services and accommodation in some Local Authority areas has resulted in individuals having to move away from their existing networks to access the services they need. This often means a move to the more urban areas of Gloucestershire where support services and specialist supported accommodation has traditionally been concentrated.

6.2 To ensure equal access to support services and specialist supported accommodation in both the urban and the more rural District Authority areas of Gloucestershire.

6.3 Sometimes individuals may wish to move to another part of the county to be close to a community of people from their background. The importance of informal support from family, friends and community groups must be recognised.

**7.0 Applying the Reconnection Policy**

7.1 The Policy will not prevent vulnerable people from accessing short–term Supporting People funded accommodation–based services as long as they meet the eligibility criteria of such a service. As such, the eligibility criteria must not apply blanket exclusions to individuals being referred/referring themselves to the service from out of area.

7.2 The supported accommodation needs of the districts’ and boroughs’ own communities should be prioritised, but access to accommodation based support services should be available to applicants from outside the area where appropriate. Where there are several applicants to a service, applicants with the greatest need should have priority. Where need is equal, local applicants will be accorded priority. This will be clarified further in the detailed procedures.

7.3 Reconnection interventions should take place for rough sleepers, particularly new arrivals, who have a link with a former area where they may have accommodation, employment, support networks (friends or family) or another connection. In this context reconnection of single homeless people is likely to be an intervention outside of statutory homelessness legislation and should not be confused with referrals made under the legislation for those in priority need. Homeless Link

7.4. It will not be appropriate to apply the Reconnection Policy to:

Rough sleepers or single homeless people where a local authority has accepted a duty under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (as amended 2002).

Service Users who would be at risk from physical, sexual or psychological harm.

Ex-offenders at risk of re-offending if they returned to an area where they have previously lived.

An individual who is in employment or full-time education/training at the time they are ready for move-on into independent living and reconnection is likely to lead to the loss of their placement or position.

7.5 Referring statutory agencies and those voluntary agencies that provide statutory duties are expected to maintain contact with the individuals they refer out of area in case those individuals reconnect back to their areas of origin. Local housing authorities, Supporting People and accommodation providers accept that supported accommodation is not spread evenly across the county. The Supporting People programme has brought benefit and has also had an impact on how services are delivered and changed how existing resources are used. It cannot be acceptable for agencies to refer service users into accommodation based support services located in areas outside of their own without an ongoing contribution to addressing the consequential need to find settled accommodation for service users when they are ready to move on.

* 1. To enable a fair distribution of service users who are able to move to settled accommodation where possible service users will be encouraged to reconnect with their area of origin. Accommodation based support providers will maintain details of the referring agency and record the service user’s place of origin. This information will be collated by the Supporting People Team and shared on a monthly basis with relevant agencies and will help to negotiate and monitor the performance of shared responsibility.
  2. Applicants with no local connection anywhere will continue to receive services in the district/borough where they presented. However to resolve the disproportionately high numbers that present or claim a ‘sustained attachment’ in urban districts compared to rural districts, it is suggested that responsibility is shared across all districts as part of the collated numbers, as used in the reciprocals arrangements. See 5.4 and 7.6.

**8.0 The Process**

* 1. The process of reconnection is based on commonly agreed guidance for identifying a presenting service user’s local area and when appropriate, establish how best to assist the service user to return to services in that area in a manner that results in a positive outcome for them.

8.2. Applicants are accepted into short-term services based on need rather than ‘local connection’. As part of the needs led assessment, a service user’s local area should be identified. Support planning should be client-focused and include discussion with the service user about available options and whether reconnection is appropriate. The outcome of that discussion should be included as a goal within the support plan.

* 1. Support plans are regularly reviewed and should include the on-going aim of reconnection.
  2. In order to accomplish the process of assisting service users into settled accommodation and to improve the through-put in schemes it is necessary to provide the framework where throughput can be achieved. This will be achieved through a range of measures that include:
* Agreed move on arrangements to social housing within Gloucestershire
* Reciprocal arrangements between local housing authorities
* Access to rent deposit schemes funded by the authority of origin, where available

8.5 Local housing authorities agree to work with those authorities that host accommodation based support services to establish such mechanisms and agreements within 12 months of this policy being approved. This is to include a detailed reciprocal agreement within the county of Gloucestershire to be developed and agreed by Gloucestershire Local Housing Authorities.

8.6A referral should be made without delay to the Supporting People Team for those service users to be reconnected. The Team will allocate such referrals for outreach and resettlement delivered via floating support services. Those responsible for the outreach and resettlement will liaise and work in close partnership with providers of accommodation based support and originating local authority areas to enable service users to reconnect to their area of origin in a planned and positive way. Where appropriate a referral will be made through the local housing authority’s joint or single assessment process.

8.7 Accommodation based and outreach and resettlement service providers have responsibility for supporting service users in accessing move on accommodation and liaising with homeless prevention services. This includes accommodation in the private sector. Applications to rent deposit schemes will be made to the local housing authority of origin.

**9.0 Monitoring the policy and outcomes**

9.1 A monitoring system will be established to oversee the operation and outcomes of the Policy. This monitoring system will be operated by the Supporting People Team and will report regularly to the Core Strategy Group and Partnership Board and the districts/boroughs.

9.2 Equalities and diversity will be monitored through the Service User Record Form and the monitoring of this Policy.

9.3 The system will monitor the following inputs as well as outcomes, including equal access to short-term supported housing:

* Details of all service users accessing short–term accommodation based services funded by Supporting People broken down by area of origin and referring agency.
* Breakdown of service users being referred to floating support services for reconnection to the identified area of origin.

* Administering referrals to floating support services for reconnection.
* Actual numbers of successful reconnections established.
* Number of service users from out of area refusing to engage with the reconnection process.
* Number of service users who were unable to return to the area previously lived due to safety, education or employment issues.
* A review of this policy to be undertaken after the first 18 months of operation and annually thereafter.