



# **Cambridge City Council Reconnection Policy and Procedure**

**June 2023**

## The status and scope of this document

1.1 This document sets out Cambridge City Council's reconnections policy. It sets out the essential definitions and says to whom the policy applies, and within what context it applies. It explains the relationship between the reconnections policy and other national and local policies and initiatives and it explains why we think this is the right approach.

1.2 This policy outlines our broad approach, but it does not explain in detail how the reconnection process will work. That is the subject of the reconnection procedure which can be found as [Appendix Two](#).

1.3 This policy supersedes all earlier versions of the Council's reconnections policy. **The main difference between this and earlier versions is that from 1 April 2023 only people from Cambridge will be able to access Cambridge services (Under the previous version all authorities in the Cambridge sub-region had equal status) and broad advice on reconnections abroad.**

1.4 This document will be formally reviewed periodically, and no less often than annually.

## 2. Definitions

2.1 In the context of this policy, 'sleeping rough' means people sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). It also includes people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or "bashes") because the individual has no accommodation they can occupy.

2.2 In the context of this policy, 'reconnection' means the process by which a person who is sleeping rough in Cambridge and who does not have a local connection to Cambridge is helped to secure suitable accommodation in their area of local connection, or in some other location, or is reconnected back to their home country.

2.3 This policy does **not** concern individuals to whom the Council may owe a housing duty under the Housing Act 1996.

2.4 This policy uses a similar broad definition of local connection as is found in [Section 199 of the Housing Act 1996](#) and the Local Authority agreement. Further explanations of the criteria are set out below.

## 3. The purpose of the reconnection policy

3.1 Cambridge City Council, and its partner, are committed to providing the best possible service to homeless people, including single homeless people not in priority need.

3.2 The Council's commitment extends to those people without a local connection. However, Cambridge does not have the capability to provide a proper level of service to everyone, from whatever location, who presents as a rough sleeper. Cambridge has a disproportionate amount

of rough sleeping for a city of its size and if we are to end rough sleeping in our city, we need to ensure that services are prioritised for people with a local connection to Cambridge. It needs to be recognised that people that have lived in Cambridge their whole lives may only have a connection to Cambridge, whilst newly arrived rough sleepers to Cambridge are likely to have other options available to them in the area that they are connected to.

The best option for most rough sleepers newly arriving in Cambridge, is reconnection to a place where they can gain accommodation and benefit from pre-existing social, family, statutory or voluntary networks. This is particularly acute where rough sleepers have made an unplanned move and abandoned 'live' supportive connections or services in so doing. It also needs to be recognised that it is in the interests of new rough sleepers for this reconnection to be made quickly, before a person begins to develop habits associated with a street-based lifestyle.

3.3 This policy is therefore intended to achieve a reasonable balance between providing for locally connected rough sleepers while ensuring that the non-locally connected are quickly assessed and quickly returned to their local district. Services to people without a local connection (unless exempted from this process under paragraph 4.2 below) will therefore be limited to what is necessary to achieve this end.

3.4 For some rough sleepers, a reconnection to their home country is a desirable option for them. This is especially the case if a person does not have recourse to public funds, so their options are limited by laws set by central Government. We know that rough sleeping is harmful and dangerous and that if we are to end rough sleeping in Cambridge, we must provide bespoke support to non-UK nationals who have unclear immigration status or no recourse to public funds. Reconnection is not limited to those without recourse to public funds as this would disproportionately affect those that wish to return, but do not have the means to do so.

3.5 Cambridge City Council is committed to ensuring that when a person wishes to return home, that this is done in a safe way. This is explained in a broad context to ensure that all services bespoke the route taken so it is best for the individual concerned.

#### **4. Key principles of the policy.**

4.1 A person sleeping rough with a local connection to Cambridge will be treated as eligible for single homeless services in Cambridge. The majority fall within the Street's to Home partnership arrangements. For those who are not locally connected to Cambridge, agencies working with rough sleepers will be expected to attempt to reconnect a person to the 'home' authority as a first priority, unless there is a risk of harm to the individual by doing so.

4.2 Access to services may also be gained by people who are not connected to Cambridge but who are at significant risk of harm (including a risk to their general welfare) should they have to return to their area of local connection (See Appendix 1 (4)). A further cause for exception may also be made for people who are unable to qualify as being locally connected to any local authority. If a person does not appear to have a local connection anywhere, agencies will be required to request an exemption from the reconnection process.

4.3 Each case of the kind referred to in 4.2 will be considered on its merits. It is anticipated that the numbers of individuals achieving a local connection by this route will be small. If a person is at risk in their area, they should be advised to make a homeless application by the partner

agencies. This will allow the individual to have their circumstances verified in more detail, but also ensure their welfare. More information about these kinds of cases can be found at *Appendix Two: Procedure*.

4.4 An exception under 4.2 must be agreed with Cambridge City Council. An exception request form should be submitted to the Council at the earliest opportunity, and certainly within five days of the agency having started to work with the client.

4.5 In some circumstances, a temporary connection may be granted, to allow agency workers to work with a client and allow access to services. The purpose of this approach is to best support the client or the services in achieving an aim, such as reducing anti-social behaviour or supporting a rough sleeper into a bed space temporarily for health reasons. For example, if a person wants access to a bed space within the Street's to Home partnership accommodation because they have been discharged from hospital, reconnection may be postponed until they recover. A temporary connection must be agreed by the Housing Advice Partnership Manager and will be recorded on Inform.

4.6 There are some services that are excluded from the reconnections policy, specifically those that are not funded under the Street's to Home partnership arrangements or do not have local connection criteria. Examples such as YMCA, Whitworth House and some move on houses fall within this category. They may have their own policies (e.g. Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire District Council have set allocation at the YMCA). It is expected that agencies do not avoid reconnecting people and just apply for accommodation with these providers, as these often have specialist support with high waiting lists and are needed for locally connected individuals with those support needs.

4.7 Cambridge Youth Foyer is open only to Cambridge City-connected people, as per the planning conditions. Agreement for a placement must be verified by the Housing Advice Service, as per the planning conditions.

4.8 Individuals refusing a suitable arranged reconnection may be denied further access to housing and related support services in Cambridge. **NB. This will not apply to arrangements made under Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP).**

4.9 Any person returning to rough sleeping in Cambridge or the sub-region within 28 days of an arranged reconnection will not be reassessed for an exemption from the reconnections policy.

4.10 Anyone returning to rough sleeping in Cambridge outside of those 28 days will be reassessed for an exemption from the reconnections policy, if there is a change in their circumstances and an application is made.

## 5. Reconnections out of the Country

5.1 It is recognised that some rough sleepers are not from the UK/ Common travel area and may be ineligible for services and public funds. It is also recognised that some individuals are eligible for public funds but require assistance to return to their country. This guidance is for those individuals that are European Economic Area (EEA) and European Union (EU) nationals. If a person is an overstayer or has no recourse to public funds from outside of these areas, please contact the Housing Advice Partnership Manager for advice.

5.2 Where the person seeking help is from another country, they may need support in order to return, particularly if they have been homeless for a while or are vulnerable. It is expected that agency workers and Council staff will be satisfied that this is the route the individual wishes to take. Those who have the means to obtain accommodation on return may require help to pay for their travel.

5.3 Those who have been homeless in the UK for a while, or who have other needs such as poor health or substance misuse problems, may require further help, including:

- help to recover or re-apply for passports and other papers
- help to find the money for the journey home
- help to reach the airport or station, or in some cases, accompanying them to ensure that they do get on the plane, train or bus

5.4 The above can be provided by Cambridge City Council if the person does not have the means to do it themselves. If an agency would like assistance to help a person reconnect abroad, then they should get in contact with the Housing Advice Partnership Manager.

5.5 Before providing help, as set out in 5.3, the Council will need to be satisfied that the person is not returning to their home country to sleep rough, and support will be provided to those individuals that need assistance to return home.

5.6 Some individuals may wish to arrange their own return without the Council's assistance or are not from the EEA/ EU and so will not qualify for assistance as set out in 5.3. More information about 'voluntary return' can be found [here](#).

### **Appendix One: Who is locally connected (or may be treated as if they are locally connected)?**

Under this policy, a local connection to Cambridge is gained in the following ways:

#### **i. Residence**

A person is normally resident within Cambridge. 'Normal residence' is defined as having been resident for six of the past 12 months, or three of the past 5 years. Residence need not have been continuous.

NB. A period spent rough sleeping will not automatically qualify as 'residence' for the purpose of establishing a local connection within this policy. A period spent in temporary accommodation can count towards a local connection, however unlawful occupation will not count after the local authority has terminated the licence.

#### **ii. Employment**

A person has stable employment (i.e. not of a short-term or a casual nature) within Cambridge and has pay slips to evidence the work they have completed. With regard to this, the applicant should actually work in the district: it would not be sufficient that their employers' head office is located in Cambridge.

#### **iii. Family associations**

A person has a parent, an adult child or an adult sibling who has been resident in Cambridge, for at least 5 years. A qualifying sibling or child must have been an adult for that 5-year period and the person must be in contact with that individual (e.g. have a relationship with the family member, not estranged).

#### **iv. Risk of harm and other considerations**

A person without a local connection may be treated as if they have a local connection as follows:

i. There is evidence that a person is at significant risk of harm should they return to the place where they have a local connection *and* there is no other district to which they are locally connected except that district where they are at risk.

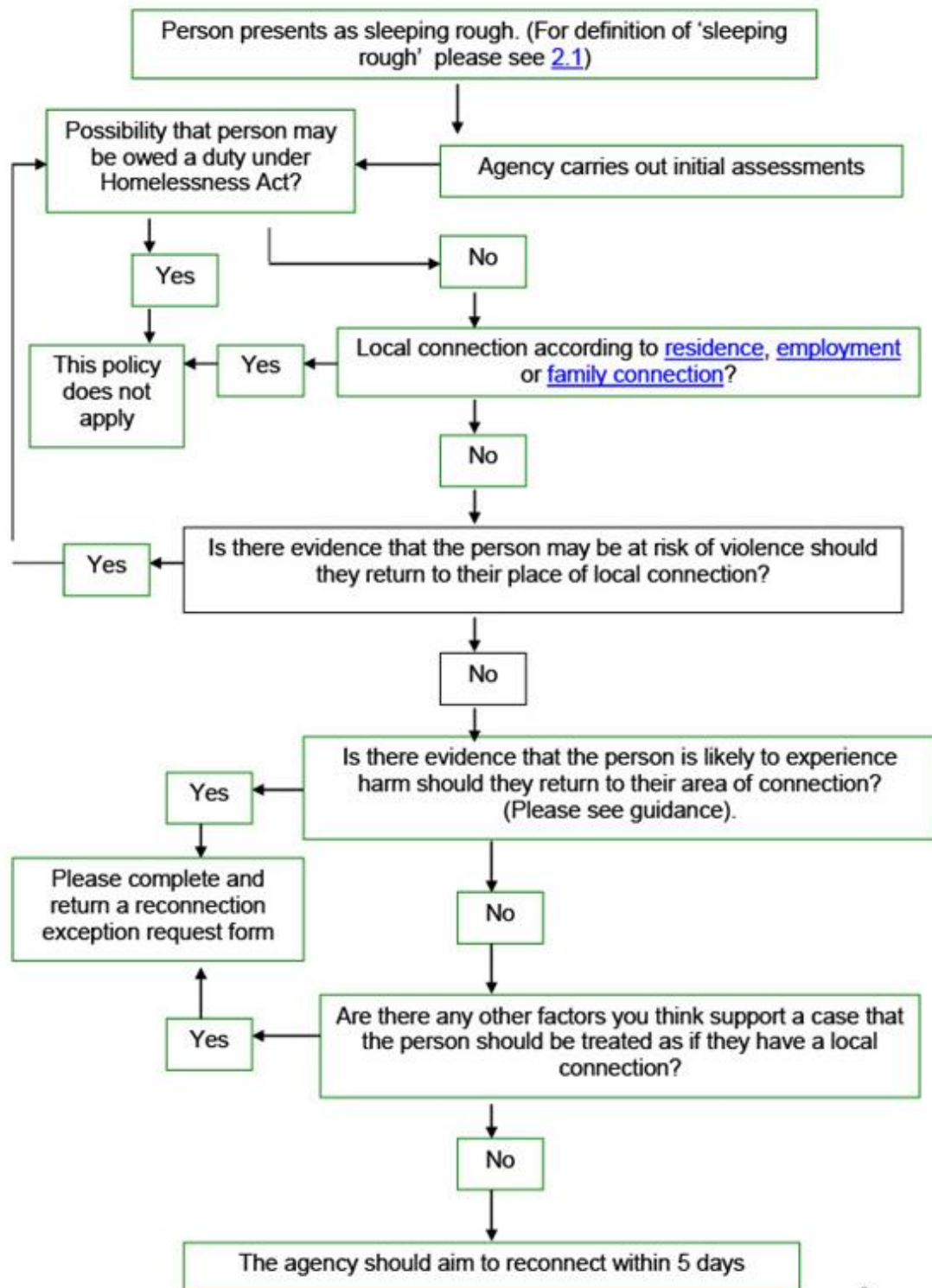
For those at risk of violence, then evidence should be provided to the Housing Advice Partnership Manager with the exception application. Examples could include information from the police or the landlord. The threshold for risk of violence is 'a risk of violence that is likely to occur', which is the same threshold as for statutory homelessness purposes under Housing Act 1996 part vii s177(1) and *Bond v Leicester CC*.

(ii) There is evidence that a person needs to remain in Cambridge for reasons of their welfare. For those that wish to remain due to medical support, it must be evidenced that the medical support is not available in their area where they are locally connected.

Addenbrookes hospital and Papworth hospital offer specialist treatment for the East Anglia region, and thousands travel to and from Cambridge every year to visit these hospitals for treatment. Unless there is evidence to prove it is not possible for the person to travel, then it is expected that individuals will travel, as the majority of people needing this specialist support do, to their appointments. It is recommended if this is the case, that the person makes a homeless application to determine their circumstances more thoroughly and to ensure their welfare is protected.

A claim under (4) must be made formally to, and confirmed by, Cambridge City Council.

**Appendix Two (1): Reconnection Procedure Overview**



## Appendix Two (2): Guidance for making a reconnection exception request

The following is intended to assist agencies when deciding to make an application on behalf of a person that relies on the exception to the local connection rule outlined in paragraph 4.2 of this policy. This guidance is not intended to be comprehensive or definitive. Agencies working with rough sleepers are encouraged to continue to take a broad view of what may be in the best interest of the client and in this way test and further refine this policy. Agency workers are encouraged to discuss any case with the housing advice partnership manager before making an application. The application form is available on Inform or by emailing the housing advice partnership manager.

1. A reconnection exception request may be made at any time. It should be made on the prescribed form and emailed to [simon.penn@cambridge.gov.uk](mailto:simon.penn@cambridge.gov.uk)
2. A request may be made in order that a client may:
  - be accepted into services;
  - be allowed access to temporary beds; or
  - have a reconnection ban overturned.
3. The reconnection exception request form should be completed with as much information as possible, in particular detailing:
  - why it is necessary for the client to remain in Cambridge;
  - what work has been undertaken to facilitate a reconnection;
  - why this work has not been successful;
  - any drug and alcohol issues including scripting;
  - agencies client is involved with;
  - physical and mental health issues;
  - (if the request is made on the grounds of access to services) why these services cannot be accessed elsewhere;
  - (if the request is made on the grounds that the client needs a period to stabilise) what is planned once this is achieved;
  - current offending behaviour; and
  - longer term planning.
4. The Housing Act 1996 (as amended) makes provision for people who have left accommodation because of the threat of, or the actual experience of, violence. As an alternative to making a reconnection exception request, case workers may wish to consider making a homelessness application on behalf of such clients. Case workers considering this are strongly advised first to speak to the Council's housing advice team. It is recognized that some individuals do not wish to make a homeless application, so 4(i) above was written to mirror the same test as those that do make an application.
5. Reconnection exception requests citing fleeing from violence should be accompanied by reasonable evidence to support the claim, such as police or former landlord reports.



## Service standards

1. A decision will be made on a fully completed exception request within five working days of receipt providing all of the information is received and accurate. In some cases, if information provided is not accurate, then it may take longer whilst investigations take place to determine the circumstances of the individual.
2. The decision will be made by the Council's Housing Advice Partnerships Manager and another senior officer, if necessary.