

Assessment & Reconnection toolkit

Good practice guidance for homelessness services

Let's end homelessness together

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Assessment & Reconnection toolkit

A brief introduction

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FEEDBACK, CORRECTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

We welcome your feedback on our publications. Please email tasmin.maitland@homelesslink.org.uk

Introduction

This toolkit will help services to develop effective assessment procedures. It is designed to support voluntary sector providers and local authorities to work with people who are sleeping rough in an area where they do not have a local connection and, as a result, cannot access the services and support needed to end their homelessness.

The definition of a 'local connection' varies depending on the context. A standard definition of local connection is used for statutory homelessness assessments, but local authorities can define their own local connection criteria, for example in relation to local welfare assistance, housing allocations and access to hostels. The impact of local connection depends on the individual's circumstances but it can often be a barrier to housing and support.

Reconnection is the process by which people sleeping rough, who have a connection to another area where they can access accommodation and/or social, family and support networks, are supported to return to this area in a planned way.

It will not be appropriate to reconnect every person sleeping rough who does not have a local connection. The reconnection offer is developed following a comprehensive assessment and is a response to a person's particular circumstances. In particular, where a local housing authority has accepted a duty to secure accommodation for a rough sleeper or single homeless person under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, reconnection policies should not be applied.

As one of a range of measures to tackle rough sleeping, reconnection plays an important role and helps to:

- reduce the risk of harm to people who are sleeping rough
- enable people to access accommodation and support in a known area
- ensure agencies provide a coordinated multi-agency approach to support
- make sure that there are enough resources to meet local need
- advocate for support from services in local areas, helping people stay close to social and family networks.

Working with migrants

Reconnection outside the UK may be a support offer for migrants who are sleeping rough. For further information and guidance about working with migrants please see:

www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/supporting-people-with-no-recourse-to-public-funds

www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/working-with-eea-migrants

www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/entitlements-of-eea-nationals

Key principles

Homelessness services should follow these principles:

- Rapid identification and reconnection of new rough sleepers is an important harm reduction measure, ending homelessness before a person's situation deteriorates further. For more on adopting this 'no second night out' approach see:
www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/adopting-no-second-night-out-standard
- Reconnection must not be used in isolation and should never just be a ticket home. Exploring why someone has become homeless and what support can prevent future homelessness should form the basis of the reconnection offer.
- Reconnection involves challenging individuals about the risks of remaining on the streets in an area where they cannot access sufficient support/services, as well as challenging services in their area of local connection to take responsibility for ensuring support/services are offered.
- Reconnection includes a wide range of potential interventions. People can be reconnected to family, friends, the private rented sector, supported accommodation projects, LA temporary accommodation, tied work with accommodation, therapeutic communities, detox or rehab programmes and more. Reconnection can be to national or international destinations.
- Reconnection involves building an offer for each individual that is credible and realistic, based on assessment and including the support required to prevent a return to rough sleeping in their current location or elsewhere. The offer should be personalised and solutions can be creative.
- Where a person refuses the reconnection offer, multi-agency work should take place to repeat the offer when they come into contact with services and to challenge them about the risks of continuing to sleep rough when there is an alternative. The offer may need to be revised if circumstances change.
- If an individual cannot return to an area due to a real threat, which is evidenced through contact with the police or other agencies in that area, then the person's current area should provide support and accommodation.

Assessment

Identification/referrals

People sleeping rough should have their needs assessed quickly and safely in order to identify options that will prevent further rough sleeping. Local authorities, in partnership with services, should find a way to do this as soon as possible after a rough sleeper is found or referred. As rough sleepers are often seen during the night, the responding service (e.g. outreach team) should be available to respond outside office hours.

Many areas already have 'no second night out' services operating on a rapid response basis. Areas without a service should consider developing their response to rough sleeping. This could include creating an assessment space using the office base of an existing outreach service, a day centre, drop-in or advice service, a night shelter or direct access accommodation. For guidance see:

www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/adopting-no-second-night-out-standard

StreetLink is a national scheme that accepts rough sleeper referrals 24/7 from the public via phone, website or app. This information is sent to the relevant local service to respond. People can also self-refer if they are sleeping rough. Local authorities and providers should keep their contact details up to date with the StreetLink

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team so that they receive referrals quickly and referrers are given accurate information about what the local response will be. For more information see: www.streetlink.org.uk

Local authorities will need to develop a process and allocate funds for transporting clients to assessment. It is unreasonable to expect someone sleeping rough to make their own way if the assessment is at a distance.

The place for assessment should be:

- easy to access – referrals via a phone call rather than a lengthy paper-based process
- physically accessible to those with disabilities or mobility issues
- available without prior risk assessment, as this will form part of the assessment
- low threshold for access i.e. no barriers based on substance use, people with no recourse to public funds or people with dogs

Wherever the assessments will take place, the following criteria are essential:

- Staffing: numbers and skills sufficient to undertake quick and thorough assessments
- Enough private space for assessments
- Relevant insurance and infrastructure to deliver a service
- Accessibility at times when rough sleepers are likely to be referred
- Access to phone (including the ability to make international calls) and computer in order to verify the information given and make contacts with areas of local connection
- Language skills: staff/volunteers with language skills, telephone translation and the ability to use Google Translate for single words/basic phrases is a must.

The face-to-face assessment

Assessments should happen quickly e.g. within one hour of arrival. In some cases this will enable the team to facilitate reconnection within a matter of hours. In complex cases the assessment process will be ongoing as the picture given on arrival may change e.g. as you get a clearer picture of support needs or housing history.

To develop a support offer, such as reconnection, assessment must include the following:

- Correct identity and demographics – ensuring name and date of birth are precise.
- Immigration status and whether the client has entitlement to benefits and housing assistance
- Factors that are important in deciding whether reconnection is important such as family connections in the UK, realistic fears about what might happen in the home country, how long they have been in the UK.
- Support needs, such as mental and physical health or substance use.
- Full housing history over 5 years – this should include accurate dates, full addresses and local authority areas.
- Data to inform planning of prevention activities, such as what they consider to be their last settled home, other places they have stayed and the reason accommodation was lost.
- Risk assessment including mitigating factors and a risk management plan, as this will be required to refer people on to other services.
- Signed consent to speak to other agencies to enable the reconnection – risk management procedures may mean that information is sought without consent in some circumstances. Homeless Link's Picture The Change project includes toolkits to help you to develop consent and confidentiality procedures: www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/demonstrating-your-impact/collecting-data

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A sample assessment form is available as part of this toolkit in a separate document that can be edited to meet the needs of your service.

Disclosure during assessment

Staff will need training in assessment skills so that they are confident to ask about support needs (e.g. drug, alcohol and mental health training) and can respond sensitively to any personal issues that are disclosed during this conversation (e.g. LGBTI awareness, diversity training).

There should be clear procedures for management support or protocols to involve external services if information shared at assessment requires an urgent or specialist response. Examples might include victims of domestic and gender violence and threats, trafficking or other crimes; people whose offending presents a current risk; and people who require urgent mental or physical health treatment.

The service can promote disclosure by asking the right questions at assessment (see the sample form include as a separate document in this toolkit) and by creating a welcoming, non-judgemental environment. Think about how the service looks to new arrivals and the messages conveyed by the physical environment e.g. posters and leaflets.

Verifying assessment information

You will need to verify information received from the client in order to advocate effectively and ensure the reconnection offer has a sound basis. You should, for example:

- ensure the details are correct e.g. accurate dates and addresses
- get formal confirmation in writing e.g. medical information from their GP
- find out if there are any support needs or risk factors not disclosed by the client.

This should be done as soon as soon as possible. In order to avoid delay, send fax and email requests at any time, including nights and weekends, then follow up during office hours.

A sample Information Request letter is included in this toolkit.

Supporting information and evidence

Supporting information and evidence is need in order to identify and access the appropriate support and services, particular if they will be presenting at a local authority housing department for assessment. Use the table below to assess which information and evidence the client will need.

Contact	When needed	What information required
GP Surgery	If client has any medical conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dates of registration Details of medical conditions/medication Confirmation in writing of why homelessness would have an adverse effect on their health conditions
Hospital	If client has had admissions or is being seen by a consultant for either physical or psychiatric conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dates of admission/ engagement Details of medical conditions/medication Confirmation in writing of why homelessness would have an adverse effect on their conditions
Supported accommodation provider	When a client states they have stayed in an accommodation project in the last 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dates of stays and whether their bed is still open Reasons for leaving and whether they can return Risk factors/support needs/other agency contacts
LA Housing Department, Housing Association, private landlord	When a client states they hold or have held a tenancy in the last 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dates of tenancies and whether it is still open Reasons for it ending and whether they can be offered another tenancy Risk factors/support needs/other agency contacts
LA Housing Options	When the client has approached the LA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirmation of approach and the outcome, such as whether s184 decision was made and the advice/assistance provided Confirmation of housing history/ local connection What support can be provided and what is the protocol for approaching them (appointment if possible)
Support or advice agencies	Where the client has engaged for support around drug and alcohol, mental health, sexual health, immigration etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dates of registration/ engagement Details of the support need and risk Confirmation in writing of why homelessness would have an adverse effect on dealing with this issue
Home Office Immigration (formerly UKBA)	For all non-EU clients where there is no proof of leave to remain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirmation of status/nationality The Immigration Compliance & Enforcement Team responsible, whether reporting arrangements are in place and whether these need to be re-initiated
Immigration advice agency or solicitor	For all non-EU clients where there is no proof of leave to remain or where there is doubt about recourse to public funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirmation of status/nationality Current status of any applications for leave to remain Likelihood of the client getting status and relevant timescale Eligibility of client for benefits and housing assistance

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Local outreach team	When a client states they have slept rough or appears to have slept rough in another area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whether they are known in the local area and confirmation of local connection • Housing history and any accommodation open to them • Engagement with any other services, support needs and risk
Embassy	Non-UK citizens who have not sought asylum. Useful when person wants a return/ needs documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What support can be provided, including tickets home • Confirmation of circumstances at home • How to get travel documents
Supportive friends or family members	With client permission and when client struggles to remember details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirmation of housing history • If they have previously accommodated why they can no longer do so (in writing if possible) • What support they are able to provide

There are key types of information that can support a rapid reconnection. Not having this information can be a significant barrier to accommodation or travel.

Identification is required for almost all reconnections into accommodation and can pose a significant barrier when presenting at Housing Options Services or when using Private Rented Schemes. Sometimes people have left these documents with friends or family members and need support to travel to get them.

For non-UK citizens who are not refugees or asylum seekers and have no fears of contact with them, the best place to start is approaching their embassy. A list of embassies and consulates can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/372146/London_Diplomatic_List_-_November_2014.pdf Be prepared for replacement documents to take a long time and cost. Local community or advice organisations may have special arrangements for this.

For UK citizens the easiest ID to procure is a Birth Certificate. The information you will need about the client is full name, date of birth, place of birth, mother's name (including maiden) and, if possible, father's name.

- Contact the General Records Office www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/certificates/default.asp by phone or by using the online ordering service. There is a standard (£9.40) and priority (£23.40) charge and you need a credit card to pay. You can easily set up an organisational account.
- Alternatively contact the Local Register Office in the place of birth. Sometimes this is quicker and cheaper, especially if the client goes there in person: <http://maps.direct.gov.uk/LDGRedirect/MapAction.do?ref=grolight>
- There is a General Records Office for Scotland: <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/contacts/opentime/index.html>
- There is a General Records Office for Northern Ireland: <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/index/contacts/contacts-az.htm/general-register-office-for-northern-ireland>

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Proof of benefits entitlement is important for entering most types of accommodation. If clients are eligible for support but do not have an active claim then they should be supported to start a claim as soon as possible. Start the process preferably by contacting Jobcentre Plus by phone (0800 055 6688), informing them that you are of no fixed abode or start a claim online:

<https://www.dwpe-services.direct.gov.uk/portal/page/portal/jsaol/lp>

If the client is supported to start the claim it may be possible to get the earliest possible Jobcentre Plus appointment at either the closest office or one closest to the area the client is being reconnected to, depending on distance. If the client's claim has only recently stopped it is possible to get a Rapid Reclaim.

Once the claim has been made, contact the Jobcentre Plus regularly to ask for proof of benefits so that this can be used to secure accommodation.

Letters and supporting information (see table above) are necessary for presenting at Housing Options Teams. The urgency of getting this information should be stressed and the request should be sent through in writing complete with signed consent and followed up by phone.

Reconnection offers

Once the assessment is done and information gathering is in process, you can start to form the reconnection offer. This is a decision-making process based on the information above and informs the package that will be offered to the client. The client should be fully involved and take responsibility throughout the process, for example helping with the information gathering process, setting up a benefit claim, applying for ID etc

The single service offer

Once enough information is available, the client should be given a single service offer. The single service offer is a clear, individual plan that is credible and realistic, based on assessment and including the support required to avoid a return to sleeping rough in your area or elsewhere.

If it is clear from assessment and information gathering that the best solution for that person is reconnection, the single service offer should include details of travel, accommodation and support elsewhere, not simply a ticket home. Even if an individual has accommodation they can return to (e.g. family, friends or their own tenancy), this should be verified and support may be required to prevent repeat homelessness. For some people, reconnection will be more likely to succeed if a member of staff or trained volunteer travels with them to their area of local connection, providing support just by being there during this point of transition.

In other cases, following assessment, it may be that an offer of accommodation should be made locally. This could be if, for example, an individual has a connection to a local area but is fleeing violence and this has been evidenced, or if they have no local connection anywhere.

Multi-agency response when a single service offer is refused

A coordinated multi-agency approach can support reconnection, with each local agency repeating the same single service offer. This reduces the risk of people continuing to sleep rough and at risk of harm in the hope

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that a different agency will make a 'better' offer. Agencies must act to manage the risk of people dying on the streets despite having alternatives. People may have unrealistic expectations about their chances of getting social housing or finding another solution to their homelessness after refusing reconnection. Access to housing has changed greatly over the years and people (including staff) are not always clear about how limited their housing options are likely to be.

Services need both to support and challenge people sleeping rough to accept the offer that will end their homelessness in the shortest time. Every year people die while sleeping rough – each agency is responsible for doing everything they can to ensure this doesn't happen to their clients.

Coordinated work should take place between agencies to limit access for people who have refused a single service offer. This avoids duplication of resources (e.g. each service assessing the same person) or an agency giving advice based on an incomplete assessment. It also reduces the risk of sustaining someone on the streets when they have an offer of housing and support elsewhere.

Ongoing assessment of a person's mental health may be needed where this is a concern.

There should be a method for people to challenge their single service offer. Agree a time period for local agencies to review the offer if people continue to live on the streets, experience deterioration in health or another significant change in circumstance.

For guidance on effective multi-agency approaches to rough sleeping, see the Task & Targeting Toolkit: www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/task-and-targeting-toolkit

Types of reconnection offers

There are a number of types of reconnection that may form the single service offer. The table below uses generalisations and example interventions – it is not an exhaustive list. In some cases people will fall into more than one grouping. Your resources and the level of support needs of the client will determine the extent to which an individual is accompanied to accommodation or support.

Reconnecting people with friends or family

A reconnection with family or significant others may, in some cases, offer an early way of helping rough sleepers off the streets. Before contacting agencies in the rough sleeper's local area, have a conversation with them about whether they have family that they might be able to return to or stay with. They might want support to reconnect with family that they have lost touch with.

The charity Missing People offers free 24-hour confidential support, help and advice by phone, email and text, including the opportunity to reconnect by exchanging messages or being supported in their reconnection via a 3-way call involving Missing People's helpline staff. They can be contacted by phone or text on 116000, also see: www.missingpeople.org.uk. Missing People respect a person's right to go missing and their service is confidential.

Table of reconnection offers

Situation	Potential reconnection offer	Hints and tips
<p>UK national and settled non-citizens, low support needs, identified local connection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Referral to Private Rented Sector (PRS) Scheme in LA where local connection is held (if available), by contacting the Housing Options service in the first instance. Search for schemes via: www.privatedsector.org.uk/ • If this is not available, it may be possible to refer to a scheme needing no local connection in a nearby area, e.g. there are some London-wide schemes. Be aware that, in most cases, people under 35 will only be entitled to the Shared Room Rate under Local Housing Allowance. • Support to reconnect with family and friends - possible referral to mediation service if they're a young person. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If an individual is planning to access PRS, they will need ID and proof of benefits. See section on supporting information and evidence above. • Clients should be supported to lead on finding properties and attending viewings with support to use internet and phone. • Unless property is not fit for habitation, the property viewed will equate to the Single Service Offer. Where possible volunteers or staff should support with viewings. • Emergency accommodation is required until client moves into accommodation • If an individual wants to reconnect with 'family', suggest that they call Missing People's confidential helpline on 116000. Missing People can pass a message home or support a 3-way call with family.
<p>UK national and settled non-citizens, medium support needs, possible to identify a connection to a local authority area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An offer will often be on the basis of what is available in the LA area: In some LAs there is a pathway in place to support access to emergency accommodation or specialist services; this may be coordinated by an outreach team or a team within the LA. • If reconnecting to an area where no pathway exists, a phone call should be made prior to presentation at the LA Housing Options. Judgement is needed on whether to advise presentation without advocacy, on the basis of whether an appointment has been made and the extent to which it seems that the client will be supported. • If medium support needs, then a Homelessness Application should still be requested, but if found not to have duty there should be an emphasis on asking what hostel accommodation/PRS with support is available. • Use www.homelessuk.org to look at accommodation projects available to people in each local area and whether they accept direct referrals. This may be a place where someone has had a previous stay. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish partnership working protocols where possible with pathways to which you regularly reconnect people. • Whether presenting with a client or supporting them to present without support, it is useful to write a supporting letter setting out the client's issues and connection to the area (set out under the terms of the Housing Act). • The final offer cannot be made until accommodation has been found • If an individual wants to try and reconnect with family or significant others, suggest that they call Missing People's free, 24-hour confidential helpline on 116000. Missing People can pass a message home or support a 3-way call with their family.

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Situation	Potential reconnection offer	Hints and tips
<p>UK national and settled non-citizens, high support needs, has a local connection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even when an individual has high support needs, the reconnection offer rests on the basis of what is available in the LA: in some areas there is a pathway in place or an agreement to refer through the outreach team. The offer may be a place at an accommodation project with support through this pathway. • If no pathway, an approach should be made to the LA where the individual has a local connection, preceded by a phone call and with the information-gathering set out above completed to the best of your ability. Escorting and advocating leads to the best results. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is useful to write a supporting letter setting out the client’s issues and connection to the area (set out under the terms of the Housing Act). • The final offer cannot be made until accommodation has been found • Please note, it is important to balance the value of information gathering with making the approach earlier rather than later, as the onus is on the local authority to investigate.
<p>UK national and settled non-citizens, where difficult to establish a local connection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodation with friends or family • Hostels that don’t require local connection, as close to where connections or support are available as possible • Services outside the LA commissioning structure, such as Emmaus Communities • PRS through a scheme not requiring local connection • Finding tied accommodation with employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local connection is about working with the client to agree what area they have connections to so that they are most likely to be successful in moving away from rough sleeping. This could converge with local connection as defined by homelessness legislation (such as residence for 6 out of 12 months, or 3 out of 5 years) or take into account contact with services, employment or connections with supportive friends or family. • Use Homeless UK to search for accommodation: www.homelessuk.org • To find tied accommodation with employment try the following: www.workabout.uk.com, www.gumtree.com, www.jobisjob.co.uk/accommodation-provided/jobs • If an individual wants to try and reconnect with ‘family’, suggest that they call Missing People’s free, 24 hour confidential helpline on 116000. Missing People can pass a message home or support a 3-way call with their family.

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Situation	Potential reconnection offer	Hints and tips
<p>European Economic Area Nationals & Swiss nationals (EU+ Norway, Iceland, Lichtenstein and Switzerland)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If EEA nationals have recently arrived in the UK, have no work history, have become a rough sleeper and have no close connections in the UK then the first offer should always be reconnection back to the home country or a country where they have support and accommodation available. Length of time in the UK and entitlement will influence whether an offer within the UK is made. • If the person has friends and family (in the UK or in another EEA country) they should be encouraged to make contact and if they do not have housing or support then the offer must include finding accommodation and referral to support. There are specialist teams who work with EEA nationals, but it is also possible to research and organise an intervention in-house. Once a plan is in place and travel/support has been booked and organised people will need to be accommodated in short term accommodation. • If the person is in receipt of welfare benefits then the same course of action should be followed as with a UK National depending on need, to ascertain a connection to an area and refer people to a local service. • If someone has high support needs then they will need to pass the test of eligibility for housing support. EEA nationals may be entitled to support and the variables include whether they have permanent right of residence (residing for 5 years and exercising treaty rights), whether they are a worker (this includes people who are temporarily unable to work, or have worked and are now registered as a jobseeker). • If low support needs and in receipt of benefits then PRS may be the offer. Information about eligibility for Housing Benefit can be found here: www.housing-rights.info/02_2_4_HB_eligibility.html#EEA-nationals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wealth of information can be found at: www.routeshome.org.uk • For more information look at Chapter 9 and Annex 12 of the Homelessness Code of Guidance. • More information here: http://england.shelter.org.uk/get_advice/homelessness/eu_and_eea_nationals/eligibility_for_housing_and_benefits#2 and here: www.housing-rights.info/03_5_Other_EEA_nationals.php • If a JSA claim has not been made, or if it was very recent, then the length of time that this would be pending means that to ensure the person is not sleeping rough, reconnection may still be the best offer to make. It is important to give people a realistic message about how long a claim takes (6 weeks minimum) and the potential barriers to a successful claim. A guide to EEA entitlement is available at: www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources

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Situation	Potential reconnection offer	Hints and tips
Asylum seekers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who have a current claim for asylum can usually get support from the Home Office. They or you can find out about this from the asylum helplines: www.gov.uk/asylum-helplines • If the asylum seeker is disabled or long term sick social services may offer accommodation and support: get advice from a solicitor specialising in this area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For anyone applying for asylum DO NOT CONTACT THE RELEVANT EMBASSY • Reconnection for this group is unlikely to be appropriate • Home Office support may be in a different area
People whose asylum claim has failed, irregular migrants, over stayers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If people have been turned down for asylum and are destitute they can apply for Section 4 support, but they have to meet strict requirements. See: https://www.gov.uk/asylum-support • Refugee Action operates an Assisted Voluntary Return Service for asylum seekers and refused asylum seekers, people with no legal status and people with discretionary leave to remain. As well as travel and documents, people who have been in the asylum system can receive a grant to help them resettle. Details at: www.choices-avr.org.uk/ 	<p>Once information such as status has been confirmed with Home Office Immigration Enforcement (formerly UKBA) / voluntary sector refugee support agencies/ solicitors a judgement on the offer needs to be made based on the likelihood and timescale of getting status. However, it is important to recognise that we are in no way giving expert advice, rather making the decision based on consultation with the above agencies.</p> <p>Homeless Link has produced a comprehensive guide to working with people who have no recourse to public funds. It is available here: www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources</p>
Individuals who are under 18 years of age	<p>Liaison with Social Services must take place to arrange accommodation and support, which may include a reconnection or family mediation. This may include accommodating the parent or guardian if the young person or child is sleeping rough with family members. If the local area is organising a designated assessment site, then in-house protocols for Child Protection should be followed.</p>	<p>If an individual wants to try and reconnect with 'family', suggest that they call Missing People's free, 24 hour confidential helpline on 116000. Missing People can pass a message home or support a 3-way call with their family.</p>
Refugees, people with humanitarian protection, people with	<p>Refugees, people with humanitarian protection and people with discretionary leave granted after an asylum application, depending on their level of support needs have the same rights to accommodation and support as British nationals. They may need support to start a claim for Job Seekers Allowance and it can be useful to refer to local advice agencies for</p>	<p>There is guidance offering practical advice for agencies on how to support refugees to access mainstream housing and benefits. It also covers the steps a service can take before a decision is received in order to prevent homelessness. The guidance is here: www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/practical-guidance-on-working-with-refugees</p>

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discretionary leave	support around their particular cultural needs.	
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Reconnection via a local authority

The approach

When approaching a Local Authority (LA), think about the following:

- Know what you are asking for. Although under homelessness legislation anyone can approach a Local Authority to make a homelessness application and/or get advice and assistance, it is worth weighing up when to approach and for what. There may be alternative referral routes for emergency or supported accommodation (see www.homelessuk.org for referral information on individual services).
- Remember that a local authority cannot refuse to assess someone who approaches it, and appears to be homeless, by suggesting that the person has no 'local connection' or would not have a 'priority need'; those are issues that should be explored as the local authority accepts an application for homelessness assistance and makes inquiries; they are not a bar to making an application at any local authority in England or Wales.
- Balance the need to demand services on an ongoing basis against the benefit of allocating time and energy when there is a reasonable chance of someone having a duty to be housed. However, remember that the onus is on the LA to investigate someone's situation.
- Call ahead and try to get an emergency appointment or at least a named appointment. Check what previous involvement they have had with the person. Ideally have a route agreed so that you don't have to go through the initial screening interview (this takes half a day in some cases). If no appointment can be made and you are just advised to present, get there early – in one local authority you have to be there half an hour before the office opens in order to get seen at all that day.
- Know the Code of Guidance inside out and take a copy with you. Find it at: www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/homelessnesscode. Use Shelter's website for updates and clear explanations of areas of housing law: <http://england.shelter.org.uk/>
- Take documentation with you, as outlined in section 3.6 above. It is a good idea to prepare by writing a supporting letter covering the Homelessness Criteria and setting out the circumstances in full. The LA can't make a decision without the relevant paperwork.
- Going to the LA with a client leads to much better outcomes than people presenting without an advocate.
- Start off taking a listening/passive approach. Always be positive and constructive and use flattery. Challenge and assertiveness is always the later response.

Homelessness criteria

The Housing Act 1996, Part 7, amended in 2002 and 2011, contains the law setting out duties on local housing authorities in relation to homelessness. It currently applies to local housing authorities in both England and Wales (although there are some differences in the law applying to England and that applying to Wales).

In April 2015, the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, Part 2, will come into effect and govern applications for homelessness assistance made to local housing authorities in Wales.

The kind of homelessness assistance a person is entitled to depend on their circumstances and how they became homeless. The Housing Act 1996 Part 7, states that enquiries must be made by a local authority about all homeless applicants to establish if they have a duty to help, and if so, what kind of help they should give.

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Every council must, by law, ensure that enquiries are made into all homeless applications. The council cannot impose thresholds – such as whether someone might have a priority need or a local connection with the council – before accepting an application for homelessness assistance.

1. Is the person homeless?

The Housing Act 1996, Part 7, states that a person is homeless if he or she has no accommodation available in the United Kingdom or elsewhere. This means that if a person has suitable accommodation anywhere in the world, which is available to them, he or she is not homeless.

A person will be considered to be homeless if he or she has accommodation available but:

- It is not reasonable to live there with people who would normally live with him or her as members of the household. This includes partners, children and carers.
- The person is not legally entitled to occupy it because there is a court order requiring him or her to leave, or there is no legal right to remain in the property.
- The accommodation is not reasonable to occupy. For example, it is in poor physical condition, and is beyond reasonable repair.
- He or she, or members of his or her household, is at risk from violence in the property.

2. Is the person eligible for assistance?

Whether or not a person is eligible for assistance depends on their immigration status, and whether they are ‘habitually resident’ in the UK. Eligibility is quite a complicated area but generally speaking the rules are as follows:

UK Citizens

A [homeless](#) British citizen who is living in the UK, and has not recently spent time living abroad, will be eligible for assistance.

EEA Nationals (EU nationals plus people from Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein; Swiss nationals should also be treated the same as EEA Nationals):

All EEA nationals have the right to look for work. However, this does not mean that they will be eligible for assistance. Categories of EU or EEA nationals eligible for assistance (and treated as exempt from the habitual residence rule) include:

- a worker – i.e. a person who has actually worked (periods of illness, unemployment and vocational training are still treated as work). Work does not need to be full-time. If they are doing genuine part-time work but need to top up their income with state benefits they can still be classed as a worker, or
- a worker who has had to stop work because of permanent incapacity and has lived in the UK for more than 2 years, or
- a person who retains worker status, or
- a worker who has had to stop work because of permanent incapacity for work resulting from an industrial illness or disease that entitled them to a full pension from a UK institution, or
- self-employed, or
- a worker or a self-employed person who has retired after having worked in the UK for at least 12 months and has lived in the UK for at least 3 years, or

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- a Croatian national who is working, for the first twelve months of his or her employment, in accordance with the worker authorisation scheme; or
- family members of workers, self-employed person and Croatian nationals working in accordance with the worker authorisation scheme.
- Other EEA nationals, who have a right to reside will be asked to satisfy the habitual residence test. This might apply to an EEA national who has a right of permanent residence as a result of having lived in the UK in accordance with EU law for five years and to any EEA national who has a ‘derivative right of residence’.

This list is not exhaustive and there are exceptions to these rules, so always research to confirm eligibility on a case by case basis.

EEA nationals, and their family members, whose only right to reside is as a jobseeker, as a family member of a jobseeker or under the initial three month right to reside are not eligible for homelessness assistance.

People who have a ‘derivative right of residence’ as a result of being the primary carer of a British citizen, and the British citizen would be unable to reside in the UK or other EEA member state if the primary carer was required to leave the UK, colloquially known as “Zambrano” carers, are also not eligible for homelessness assistance.

Croatia

Transitional arrangements for people from Croatia are in place until 30 June 2018 (and could then be extended for another two years). For details see: www.gov.uk/croatian-national

Other people from abroad

People who are not British citizens or who are not from an EU or EEA country may not be eligible for assistance. A person will probably be eligible if he or she :

- has indefinite leave to enter or remain (‘settled status’)
- is a refugee
- has humanitarian protection in the UK
- has been granted discretionary leave in the UK with no restrictions on access to public funds .

Habitual residence

If a person has recently come to the UK or is a British Citizen returning to the UK after a period of time abroad, he or she may be subject to the Habitual Residence Test. As part of this the council will investigate the person’s reasons for coming to the UK and their ties to this country. Annex 10 in The Code of Guidance goes into detail about the HRT and is worth looking at if any cases come up involving this, although it was published in 2006 and so is not up to date with recent case-law. Refugees and some others are exempt from the HRT.

3. Is the person in priority need?

A local authority only has a duty to provide immediate temporary accommodation for people who are homeless, eligible for assistance and who may be in priority need.

A person is considered to be in priority need if he or she:

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- has dependent children living with them or have dependent children who might reasonably be expected to live with them
- is pregnant or resides, or might reasonably be expected to reside, with a pregnant woman;
- is vulnerable as a result of old age (people over 60 may be considered vulnerable), mental illness or handicap or physical disability or other special reason
- is 16 or 17 years of age
- is homeless as a result of flood, fire or other disaster
- are age 18-20 and are a care leaver
- is vulnerable as a result of leaving prison or the armed services, or as a result of having spent time in care when younger and is now over the age of 21.

The critical test for vulnerability is whether the applicant is less able to fend for him/herself so that he/she will suffer injury or detriment if sleeping rough, in circumstances where a less vulnerable person would be able to cope without harmful effects. It should be noted that, with regards to homelessness applications, sleeping rough is not in itself evidence of vulnerability. The Court of Appeal has recently decided that someone who would be considered to be vulnerable if he or she were alone, but has the support of a member of the household which would mean that the applicant would not suffer injury or detriment when sleeping rough, is not considered vulnerable. This decision is due to be considered by the Supreme Court in late 2014.

If a person is not "in priority need" he or she is entitled to advice and assistance to help them find their own accommodation. There are no rules about what "advice and assistance" means and this can vary depending on the local authority involved.

If a local authority has a reason to believe that a person is homeless, eligible for assistance and in priority need it should provide interim accommodation while the situation is investigated.

It is important to note that a local authority only needs to have a "reason to believe" that a person is homeless, eligible for assistance and in priority need in order for it to have a duty to provide interim accommodation. This should mean that a huge amount of proof of medical conditions etc should not be required. However in practice this is not always the case.

4. Is the person intentionally homeless?

The local authority will investigate whether a person is "intentionally homeless". In order to make an intentionally homeless decision, a local authority will need to be satisfied that the person has deliberately done or failed to do something and as a result of this he or she has lost suitable accommodation that would have been available.

For example, you could be "intentionally homeless" if you:

- sell or give up your home when there is no need to and you do not find other suitable accommodation before you sell or give up your home;
- do not pay your rent or mortgage repayments when you can afford to;
- ignore housing advice, which would have prevented the loss of your home; or
- were evicted because of anti-social behaviour.

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If a person is intentionally homeless then he or she is entitled to advice and assistance from the council. If the person has a priority need, he or she should also be entitled to accommodation for a reasonable period of time, usually 28 days, while they find accommodation of their own.

5. Does the person have a "local connection"?

A person will usually have a local connection if:

- he or she has lived in the area for at least 6 out of the past 12 months, or 3 out of the last 5 years;
- he or she is employed in the area;
- he or she has close family living in the area, who have lived there for at least five years;
- there are other special circumstances, which connect the person to the area; or
- they occupied accommodation under the Home Office scheme (formerly known as "NASS") for accommodation for asylum-seekers in the area.

These factors are not exclusive. A person could have more than one reason to have a local connection with a local housing authority, or a person could have a local connection with more than one local housing authority. If a person has a local connection with the local housing authority to which he or she has applied, he or she not be referred to another local housing authority with which he or she also has a local connection. Where someone has no local connection with any local housing authority, the local housing authority to which the application was made must take responsibility.

Implications of homelessness criteria

The implications for individuals of passing the tests set out above are as follows:

- The 'main housing duty' will be owed to a person who is homeless, eligible for assistance, has a priority need and has not become homeless intentionally. This is a duty to secure accommodation for the person, and all members of his or her household, until one of a number of specified events occur:
 - usually an offer of social housing or
 - (for local housing authorities in England only) a private rented sector offer of an assured shorthold tenancy offered by a private landlord for a minimum period of 12 months.

If any accommodation is rejected by the person, there is a substantial risk that the local housing authority can decide that its duty has come to an end and no longer secures accommodation;

- Where someone would be entitled to the 'main housing duty' but has been referred due to local connection to a different local housing authority, that different local housing authority will be subject to the 'main housing duty' and is bound by the decisions of the referring local housing authority on whether the person is homeless, eligible, has a priority need and has not become homeless intentionally;
- Where someone is homeless, eligible for assistance, has a priority need but has been found to have become homeless intentionally, there are two duties:
 - To provide advice and assistance to that person to help him or her secure his or her own accommodation; and

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- To provide accommodation for the person and his or her household for a period – often 28 days but it could be shorter or longer – that the local authority decides will give that person a reasonable opportunity to secure his or her own accommodation;
- Where someone is homeless and eligible for assistance, but does not have a priority need (whether or not he or she became homeless intentionally), there is a duty to provide advice and assistance to that person to help him or her secure his or her own accommodation;
- A council has a power, but not a duty, to secure accommodation to a person who is homeless, eligible for assistance, does not have a priority need and has not become homeless intentionally, in practice councils very rarely exercise this power;
- No duties are required to help a person who is not homeless, or who is not eligible for assistance.

Reconnection to EEA countries

In some areas there are specialist services or workers that lead on reconnection and have relevant support for languages, links to embassies and funding for documents and transport. Check with your local authority to find out if this type of specialist support is available locally or if it can be spot purchased to meet an emerging need.

In areas where homelessness among migrants is an issue, agencies should alert the local authority and use a multi-agency approach to develop their response. Patterns of migration change, different responses may be required to ensure services have access to relevant languages, consulates and reconnection options. For guidance on coordinating multi-agency work see: www.homeless.org.uk/effective-action/taskandtargeting

The Thames Reach website, Routes Home, is an excellent source of practical information on how to deliver a reconnection service. It includes good practice guidelines and contact details of consulates, as well as factsheets on what services are available in each country so that agencies can help people to plan support for their return. www.thamesreach.org.uk/what-we-do/routes-home/about-routes-home/

Reconnection outside the EEA

Much of the guidance given above can also be applied to reconnection outside the EEA. However there may be additional issues to consider, such as the possibility that the migrant may make an application to stay in the UK, cost of reconnection and, in some cases, the willingness of a person's embassy to provide travel documents, ID or other support for their return. This may mean a longer lead-in period to prepare the reconnection during which interim accommodation is needed.

For irregular or undocumented migrants there are options around voluntary return. Refugee Action delivers the Choices Assisted Voluntary Return service. This scheme is for irregular/undocumented migrants and also asylum seekers who choose to return before receiving a decision, have been refused asylum or have discretionary leave to remain. Some people will be entitled to financial support to help them reintegrate on their return. www.choices-avr.org.uk/

The Choices website includes individual stories of return: www.choices-avr.org.uk/stories_of_return

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For more guidance on working with people with no recourse to public funds see:

www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/supporting-people-with-no-recourse-to-public-funds

Interim accommodation

Reconnection should be a rapid process, however sometimes there are delays in collecting the relevant paperwork. This is a particular issue for migrants who need to replace ID and travel documents. Given the risks associated with sleeping rough, services supporting these people should seek interim accommodation so that they are safe and can continue to engage with the reconnection process. As many migrants will not have recourse to public funds, bed spaces commissioned through housing-related support contracts might not be an option. Alternatives include:

- An agreement with the local authority that projects will make voids available for emergency stays when there is going to be a delay letting a void room
- Night shelters
- Hostels or other projects that are not publically funded (e.g. voluntary sector or church projects)

Sample text for information request letter

[Insert GP name]

[Insert GP address]

[Date]

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: URGENT REQUEST FOR MEDICAL INFORMATION FOR *[Insert name and DOB]*

My name is *[insert name]* and I am an *[job title]* at *[insert project name and briefly describe project's objectives]*

I am currently assisting a client, *[insert name]* who I understand is a registered patient of yours. As I am in the process of trying to reconnect and accommodate *[insert name]*, it would be extremely helpful if you could provide any of the following information:

- Details of any current or historical health conditions
- Details of any medication that has been prescribed
- Your opinion as to whether my client would be particularly vulnerable if *[s/he]* were to remain homeless.

It would also be useful if you could confirm the address that *[insert name]* is registered as living at and for how long they have used that address whilst being registered at your surgery. This information is of particular importance as it could help determine a local connection which could contribute to helping them get housed.

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If you could provide me with this information as soon as possible I would be extremely grateful as my client is currently homeless. A signed consent form is attached.

You can send the information by fax or email to *[insert contact details]*

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

[Job title]

[Project name]



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless in England. We work to make services better and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness.

Let's end homelessness together

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