SUSSEX Homeless Outreach Reconnection & Engagement (SHORE)

Pilot RECONNECTIONS Protocol

May 2014

Adur District Council
Arun District Council
Brighton & Hove City Council
Chichester District Council
Crawley Borough Council
Eastbourne Borough Council
Hastings Borough Council
Horsham District Council
Lewes District Council
Mid Sussex District Council
Rother District Council
Wealden District Council
Worthing Borough Council
1.0 Background

Tackling rough sleeping is an obligation for all local authorities in England as part of the preventing homelessness agenda. When street homelessness occurs, the more quickly assistance can be accessed and subsequently offered, the better.

Sleeping rough has a hugely negative impact on the person concerned as well as on society as a whole. The longer a person continues to sleep rough the harder it becomes to leave the streets and return to a more secure lifestyle. We recognise that people often migrate outside of their “home area” to sleep rough, often where existing services to support rough sleepers are prevalent. However, this will often be away from support networks, which affects individuals negatively. Rapid reconnection to the client’s home area or relocation to places with their support networks will help ensure that many of these people do not make the streets their home.

The 13 local authorities within the historic geographic area of Sussex formed a strategic “grouping” following the allocation of rough sleeper funding to the group in 2011 from DCLG. Sussex Homeless Outreach Reconnection & Engagement (SHORE) is using this funding to develop prevention, services and support for those sleeping rough in Sussex. This group works closely together to share best practice and deliver strategic improvements to frontline services to support those who find themselves needing to sleep rough in the district, helping them to secure suitable alternatives.

Our work supports the “No Second Night Out” (NSNO) standard – the aim of which is to ensure those sleeping rough receive rapid help to ensure they do not spend a second night out. The group have developed an action plan, which includes an action to adopt a common rough sleeper Reconnection Protocol across Sussex.

SHORE has commissioned St Mungo’s Broadway to provide outreach services in Sussex, working alongside the existing service provided by CRI in Brighton & Hove and other local services. Although the primary purpose of this Protocol is to set out the role of Sussex Outreach Services and local authorities, SHORE members recognise that housing is only one element of effective reconnection and relocation. That is why SHORE seeks the support and engagement of partner agencies across Sussex to make this Protocol work, as illustrated in Section 4.4 of this document.

2.0 Purpose

The purpose of this Protocol is to allow rough sleepers, particularly new arrivals into the local authority area, to reconnect or relocate in a planned way to an area where they either have;
- accommodation; or
- support networks; or
- other connections to another local authority area.
It is widely known that support networks, both formal and informal, increase the opportunity for people to secure stable housing and prevent the need for rough sleeping. This Protocol is aimed at acting in the best interests of the client to ensure they are reconnected to areas they are familiar with and can access services in the community leading to the securing of more stable accommodation within that area. This Protocol sets out a framework across Sussex to facilitate rapid reconnection or relocation to prevent people sleeping rough in our area unnecessarily.

This Protocol does not over-ride any legal requirements or obligations which are placed on individual local authorities within the SHORE grouping. Each local authority is responsible for ensuring they fulfil any legal duties and obligations placed on them. This includes any obligations they have to clients who have a priority need as defined by legislation. As such this Protocol is aimed at assisting those sleeping rough with reconnection to their “home area” or relocation, over and above statutory duties owed to the client by the identifying local authority.

3.0 Definitions
For the purposes of this Protocol and supporting procedure the following definitions will apply.

3.1 Rough Sleeper
This definition is taken from DCLG Guidance “Evaluating the Extent of Rough Sleeping: A new approach September 2010”:

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). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or “bashes”).

In addition, this policy applies to anyone residing in a direct access night shelter out of their area of local connection.

3.2 Local Connection
The definition used for the purposes of this Protocol will be the same as set out in the Housing Act 1996 and set out in the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities July 2006 as follows:

Section 199 (1) provides that a person has a local connection with the district of a housing authority if he or she has a connection with it because:

1) he or she is, or was in the past, normally resident there, and that residence was of his or her own choice; or
2) he or she is employed there; or
3) of family associations there (parent, sibling, adult child); or
4) of any special circumstances
The council will usually consider that you have a local connection if you have lived in the area for a total of six months out of the last 12 months, or three years out of the last five years. However, you may not have a local connection if you have only lived in an area because you have been in prison or in a hospital.

SHORE area Outreach Services or a local authority conducting a client’s assessment under this Reconnections Protocol is responsible for determining where the client has a local connection before assisting with reconnection or relocation to an alternative area. For further guidance and information please refer to the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities July 2006 on the DCLG website:

**Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities July 2006**

### 3.3 Identifying Authority

**3.3.1** The identifying local authority is either the locality where the individual:
- is sleeping rough where an approach by SHORE area Outreach Services, local authority or partner is made to the individual to assist them; or;
- has approached SHORE area Outreach Services or local authority stating they are sleeping rough – the local authority approached by the individual is deemed to be the identifying authority (this may include clients who are not actually sleeping rough within the identifying authority’s district).

**3.3.2** As this is a cross authority Protocol, on rare occasions, it is possible that a client sleeping rough may approach another Sussex local authority outside of the area in which they are sleeping rough for assistance with reconnection under this Protocol. This may mean that the client’s initial identifying local authority may (rarely) not be the authority in which they are sleeping rough.

The spirit of local authorities (LAs) in the Sussex area adopting this Protocol ensures that the LA approached becomes the identifying authority and intervenes rapidly. Where possible and appropriate, SHORE area Outreach Services will initiate the reconnection process across Sussex. However, it is not appropriate for LAs in Sussex to turn clients away suggesting they approach another Sussex LA for assistance under this Protocol.

On rare occasions if resource intensive work is required where the geographic location of the rough sleeper is causing difficulties, the case may need to be transferred to the LA in which the client is sleeping rough (for example where specialist floating support is required to engage with the client). By adopting this Protocol, all partner LAs agree to rapidly intervene when anyone approaches them, but must be realistic about the limitations this may place on them which may require the case to be transferred to SHORE area Outreach Services or an alternative LA. If this is likely to be required, frontline officers must alert their Senior Officer without delay who will liaise with SHORE area Outreach Services or alternative LA Senior Officer to mutually agree a transfer.
of the case on the grounds of it being unreasonable for the initial identifying LA to assist.

Referrals must not be initiated on the first day of casework – it is the responsibility of the initial identifying SHORE area Outreach Service worker or LA to commence rapid reconnection or relocation casework rather than simply referring the case over. In addition, a rough sleeper should not be reconnected to another area where it is known they will continue to sleep rough.

3.3.3 Outreach workers, including those commissioned by SHORE, will make initial assessments of rough sleepers when coming into contact with them and lead on assisting local authorities with reconnection or relocation where appropriate.

3.4 Receiving Authority (client’s “home area”) The receiving authority is normally the local authority deemed to be individual’s “home” authority with which they are to be reconnected. In some cases a receiving authority may be one that has agreed to accept a ‘relocated’ rough sleeper. For example, two or more local authorities in Sussex may develop mutual arrangements to support rough sleepers who cannot be reconnected to their home area in Sussex where it is not appropriate (see examples in 4.1 below).

4. The Reconnection Procedure The reconnection procedure should be applied by SHORE area outreach workers and/or each local authority housing options/homeless department when it becomes aware of a person sleeping rough in their area or where they receive an approach for assistance from a rough sleeper (except in rare circumstances see 3.3.2 where the initial identifying authority may need to agree a transfer of case to an alternative LA).

4.1 Is Reconnection appropriate? It is not appropriate for SHORE area outreach workers and/or housing options/homelessness frontline staff to consider assisting reconnection or relocation for a rough sleeper in certain circumstances. This could include (but the list is not exhaustive):

- Clients fleeing domestic violence or the threat of violence
- Clients fleeing other violence by persons not associated with the client including racial violence
- Where a return to a specific area is known to be a return to high levels of substance or alcohol misuse. The risk created by renewing associations with particular previous acquaintances may be sufficient to warrant an exception from reconnection or relocation.
- Where an injunction, ASBO or bail conditions prevent their return to a specific area
- Where the client will be reconnected to an area where it is known that they will continue to sleep rough
Where the client cannot be reconnected to their area or relocated due to specific reasons such as those listed above, outreach workers and frontline LA officers should explore all other potential local authority areas where the client may wish to be relocated. If it is deemed there are no suitable local authority areas then reconnection or relocation would not be appropriate. In these circumstances SHORE area Outreach Services and LAs should follow **4.2** entitled “Client’s with no local connection to any area”.

### 4.2 Clients with no local connection to any local area

There are a small minority of individuals who present to services who have no links to any local area and therefore no reconnection or relocation can be made. They are often extremely vulnerable and have complex, multiple needs. Their tendency is to not stay in one area for long enough to develop networks and engage with supporting services, often being too chaotic to make or claim benefits. Such individuals rarely engage with services, however when they do, it is essential that they receive a swift response to maximise their chances of engagement.

This Protocol recognises the existence of this small group of individuals and that they may fall outside the remit of reconnection and relocation. These individuals should be dealt with on a case by case basis by SHORE outreach workers and the identifying local authority, see section 4.4, and treated as having a high level of support needs.

### 4.3 When to invoke the Reconnection procedure

Early intervention is essential to securing a rapid reconnection or relocation for those sleeping rough and to minimise the need for clients to sleep rough for a second night. It is expected that SHORE area outreach workers and/or LA frontline housing options / homelessness staff will commence reconnection or relocation casework the same day as either:

- **Direct referral into the service** - the client presents to them at the LA offices; or
- **Indirect referral into the service** - when LAs are notified by a third party of the location of a new rough sleeper on the streets.

The manner in which reconnection or relocation work is commenced will depend on whether the referral into the service is direct or indirect and the services/resources available in each district. For example where indirect referral has been made to the LA, they may request assistance from SHORE area outreach workers to attempt engagement, initially to gather information. The direct referral mechanism will enable officers to gather information and assist with reconnection or relocation more rapidly. However, the basis of this Protocol anticipates whichever method the client is referred into the service that SHORE area Outreach Service and LAs will incept casework the same day.

### 4.4 Partnerships with other Agencies
Rough sleepers do not only have housing needs so SHORE recognises that effective reconnection and relocation work in Sussex cannot work without active partnership working between local authorities and other agencies, for example:

- Where an ‘out of hours’ service is not available from Sussex authorities or from outreach workers, SHORE is working with **Sussex Police** to seek their support in helping identify and signpost rough sleepers to appropriate support and services until outreach and/or LA services can intervene;
- Where rough sleepers have an offending history, SHORE will work with **Surrey & Sussex Probation Services** and their partners such as NACRO to make sure services are co-ordinated;
- SHORE will work closely with **voluntary and community organisations, including housing associations and faith groups**, who provide services and support to rough sleepers, including outreach, drug and alcohol services and hostels;
- SHORE will work with **East Sussex and West Sussex County Councils** who provide important support services to single homeless people and rough sleepers through, for example, youth services, social care, and ‘Supporting People’ type services;
- The National Health Service, through **Clinical Commissioning Groups and Health & Wellbeing Boards**, are important partners for SHORE in addressing the health and **mental health** needs of rough sleepers;
- **UK Border Agency** (and any successor bodies) where reconnections outside the UK are needed or being considered.

### 4.5 STEP 1 - Assessing Client level of need for Reconnection or Relocation action by LA

This procedure identifies the level of client needs and the responses required to assist them. The identification of client need and the action taken will generally be conducted by SHORE area Outreach Services in the first instance. Where appropriate, LA Housing Options and Homelessness frontline staff will also need to make assessments.

**Appendix 1** offers a simple checklist to support staff with frontline delivery of this Protocol. Officer’s responsible for assessing client’s reconnection needs must assess the level of need and appropriateness for reconnection and must establish this during their normal course of enquiries with the client or their advocate.

Levels of need or relevance for reconnection or relocation will need to be assessed to identify the level of support needed by rough sleepers, ranging from clients with low to no support needs through to people with complex needs, priority needs and those with the highest level of vulnerability, including rough sleepers with no local connection. Where appropriate ‘Dual Diagnosis’ should be obtained from relevant health and mental health authorities.
Homelessness applications must be considered separately and offered within housing options advice to clients who present as homeless in line with Housing Act/Homeless Legislation. The assessment of reconnection or relocation level is to enable officers to consider the most appropriate level of action to assist the client with reconnection back to their receiving authority and as such this policy is not a means to “gate keep” formal homeless applications.

4.6 STEP 2 - Identifying LA action and receiving LA response to Reconnection and Relocation

It is anticipated that the majority of individuals will fall into relatively low level interventions such as reconnecting clients to a ‘home’ area following a basic interview, including the payment of transport costs. Additional funding is being made available to facilitate this via SHORE, including outreach services. SHORE has also allocated a budget to pay for short term accommodation up to 72 hours (seven nights in exceptional circumstances) while reconnection or relocation arrangements are made with the receiving LA. **SHORE has a budget to assist the SHORE Outreach Service and Sussex local authorities to pay for the cost of reconnections and relocations and for temporary accommodation across Sussex for rough sleepers.**

In a smaller number of more complex cases where a housing duty has been established, negotiations with the receiving LA may need to include securing alternative accommodation. Resources will be made available from SHORE to facilitate this. Officers should record their assessment of the client’s level of reconnection or relocation need with reasons for their decision.

Once assessment of the level of need for reconnection or relocation has been made by SHORE area outreach workers and/or the identifying authority officers, they should proceed to take the appropriate action on a case by case basis.

4.7 Reconnection and European Economic Area (EEA) Nationals

SHORE authorities will develop a staged approach for EEA nationals where offers of reconnection through the SHORE Outreach Service will go alongside ensuring people are supported to fulfil their treaty rights, offers of support around documentation, job advice etc. Administrative removal and involvement of UKBA and successor bodies will be implemented at an appropriate stage in the process, in partnership with Sussex Police.

[www.routeshome.org.uk](http://www.routeshome.org.uk) is a DCLG funded website designed to help local authorities and others to help people reconnect to their own country. The website includes good practice guidelines, consulate information and Eastern and Central European country information.

On request, SHORE can provide Sussex LAs with:

1.) **Guidance for Reconnection Assessment and**
2.) **Guidance for Identifying LA Action for Taking & Receiving Reconnection Clients**
5 **Review of the Protocol**

5.1 Review of this Pilot Protocol, its effectiveness and any issues which arise on the frontline will be initially conducted by the SHORE Steering Group after six months (in November 2014) of operation of the Protocol to ensure the aims and objectives are being delivered and make any necessary changes.

5.2 If the Protocol is to continue beyond the initial six month period, it will be reviewed annually by all LAs and their partners involved using the statistical data gathered.

6 **Monitoring**

6.1 SHORE area Outreach Workers and LA Case officers assigned reconnection and relocation casework will be responsible for collation of client data. Once collated this information will be fed into a Sussex wide spreadsheet.

6.2 Monitoring of reconnection and relocation activity will be undertaken by SHORE area outreach services and senior officers within each LA. This will include reports to monitor the success or otherwise of reconnection and relocation activities per LA area. The collation of this data by SHORE will help identify gaps, reveal patterns of rough sleeping locally, numbers of people refusing to engage with the process and the costs of delivering the Protocol. Monitoring will help inform trends to assist preventing and reducing rough sleeping in Sussex.

6.3 The intention is for data to be shared across Sussex (excluding client names) to inform the SHORE Steering Group and to assist in the strategic development and improvement of frontline services for rough sleepers. The intention is for SHORE area Outreach Services, working with each LA, to produce reports at least quarterly and to monitor the consistent application of this Protocol across the districts.

6.4 Issues arising from the SHORE Reconnections Protocol will be brought to the attention of LA housing officers and lead members.
Appendix 1 – Reconnection and Relocation checklist for SHORE area Outreach Workers and Housing Options staff use

- Check what information is already available from partners
- Undertake assessment of client’s support, health and housing needs & discuss reconnection options
- Discuss housing options with client (inc. housing register / temporary accommodation / homelessness application).
- Ask client if they wish to return to another area & obtain consent to disclosure to enable you to make relevant enquiries
- Establish if it is safe for the client to return to another area
- Make contact with the receiving authority / landlord / housing provider to ensure that accommodation and / or support services are available for the client in the receiving authority
- Agree arrangements between client and receiving authority / landlord / housing / support provider to ensure reconnection or relocation is facilitated
- Where needed, draw upon SHORE funds to ensure clients have the means to return home & supply client with public transport details / options
- Where support is available, including SHORE funds or local volunteers, arrange for the client to be accompanied to the train / bus station to commence their journey to receiving authority.
- Make contact with the receiving authority / landlord / housing / support provider saying that the client is en route
- Make arrangements to follow up the case to verify client has arrived safely
- Complete Reconnection monitoring form (this must be completed even if reconnection or relocation is not successful or clients refuse option of reconnection)