
RECONNECTIONS POLICY

**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor Bill Dixon,
Neighbourhood Services and Community Safety Portfolio**

Responsible Director - Cliff Brown, Director of Community Services

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek approval from Cabinet for the Reconnections Policy at **Appendix 1**.

Summary

2. In 2007/2008, over a third of the people who accessed hostel bed spaces in Darlington were from out of the Local Authority area. Darlington is easily accessible and has a number of amenities that are not available in other surrounding areas. Accommodation is often sought and found within one of the 4 hostels funded by the Supporting People programme, even when such accommodation and support is not required or does not meet the needs of the individual. The impact of unplanned or inappropriate referrals into services can result in people being put more at risk of homelessness and puts a strain on other services in Darlington.
3. The purpose of the Reconnections Policy is to ensure that people who do not have a local connection to Darlington have the opportunity to be reconnected to their local authority area, where this is appropriate to do so.

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that Members approve the Reconnections Policy at **Appendix 1**.

Reasons

5. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
 - (a) To ensure homeless services in Darlington are available for those with the most appropriate needs.
 - (b) To ensure that people without a local connection to Darlington and who are not in need of homeless services, are supported to be reconnected back to their own local authority area.

Cliff Brown
Director of Community Services

Background Papers

Developing a Single Point of Access for Darlington
Supporting People Commissioning Strategy

Anthony Sandys : Extension 2512

S17 Crime and Disorder	Contributes to providing safe and secure accommodation for vulnerable homeless people.
Health and Well Being	The provision of housing related support for homeless people extends their potential for independent living and reduces incidence of homelessness.
Sustainability	There are no environment impacts associated with is policy.
Diversity	The Council's duties arising from its statutory obligations, under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and the Race Relations and Sex Discrimination Acts have been complied with.
Wards Affected	Individuals accessing services funded by Supporting People could be from all wards.
Groups Affected	Vulnerable homeless people with support needs.
Budget and Policy Framework	Any decisions relating to services funded through Supporting People must be within the grant allocation from the CLG.
Key Decision	This is a key decision.
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The reconnections policy contributes to the Healthier and Safer Darlington themes.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

6. In 2008, a strategic review of the homeless services funded by the Supporting People programme was carried out. To enable more needs data to be collected to inform the future commissioning of services and to better manage referrals into homeless hostels, a Single Point of Access (SPA) has been established. This is a partnership between Darlington Borough Council's Housing Options team and First Stop, a local charity dedicated to working with homeless people to improve their life chances. The SPA will work with all people who access either service because they are homeless or are at risk of being homeless.
7. The SPA will look at the holistic needs of the customer, refer them on to specialist agencies (where appropriate), and work to prevent homelessness, or refer the customer onto a homeless hostel. Options will be given to the customer, based on a comprehensive assessment of need. The SPA will work with the customer to determine which route is most appropriate for them, once all the options have been explored.
8. In 2007/2008, over a third of the people who accessed hostel bed spaces in Darlington were from out of the Local Authority area. Darlington is easily accessible and has a number of amenities that are not available in other surrounding areas. Accommodation is often sought and found within one of the 4 hostels funded by Supporting People, even when such accommodation and support is not required or does not meet the needs of the individual.
9. Hostel bed spaces are then taken up by people who do not necessarily have the appropriate need to be there. This results in bed blocking and those, who do have a need which can be met through hostel accommodation, have to be found accommodation in inappropriate bed and breakfast arrangements where support is not available. This can lead to any other support needs becoming exacerbated. It is widely recognised that support networks, whether formal or informal, increase the opportunity for people to move away from homelessness.
10. This policy does not seek to prevent people from accessing short-term supported accommodation in Darlington. Priority will always be given to those who present with the greatest need. However, where services are at capacity, or near to capacity, priority will then be given to those who also have a local connection to Darlington. The reconnections policy seeks to ensure that people who do not have a local connection to Darlington have the opportunity to be reconnected to their home Local Authority area, where this is appropriate to do so.

Outcome of Consultation

11. A range of key partners and stakeholders were consulted as part of the strategic review of homelessness, in developing this policy. These included:
 - (a) Providers of accommodation for homeless people.
 - (b) Providers of housing related support for homeless people.
 - (c) Current service users of supported homeless services.
 - (d) Voluntary organisations working with homeless people, such as First Stop.
 - (e) Other Local Authorities who frequently refer people to homeless services in Darlington.

12. An Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken as part of the strategic review of homeless services and this policy also reflects the outcomes of this impact assessment.