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The reconnection of rough sleepers within the UK: an evaluation

Sarah Johnsen & Anwen Jones
March 2015

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CRISIS

The reconnection of rough sleepers within the UK: an evaluation

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February 2015

About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people. We are dedicated to ending homelessness by delivering life-changing services and campaigning for change.

Our innovative education, employment, housing and well-being services address individual needs and help homeless people to transform their lives.

We are determined campaigners, working to prevent people from becoming homeless and advocating solutions informed by research and our direct experience.

About the authors

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This report is available to download free of charge from www.crisis.org.uk

Contents

Acronyms

ASBO	Anti-Social Behaviour Orders
CHAIN	Combined Homelessness and Information Network
CLG	Communities and Local Government
HTF	Homelessness Transition Fund
LA	Local Authority
NLA	Needs Led Assessment
NSNO	No Second Night Out
SSO	Single Service Offer

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

Key points

- Reconnection, defined in policy as 'the process by which people sleeping rough who have a connection to another area … are supported to return to this area in a planned way' has become an increasingly prevalent feature of rough sleeping strategies in England in recent years, albeit largely in the absence of robust evidence regarding the impacts on rough sleepers. Evidence regarding reconnection outcomes is, at present, very weak.

- Inter-city reconnections, that is, the reconnection of British nationals from one urban centre to another within the UK, comprise the majority of reconnections from some areas. In London, these are outnumbered by international reconnections (involving moves abroad) and intra-city reconnections (from one borough to another). This study focused on within-UK (inter-city and intra-city) reconnections only.

- Reconnection is an umbrella term used to refer to a wide range of approaches, including: 'reconnection (proper)' which supports rough sleepers to return to somewhere they have an established link; 'diversion' which supports them to access services somewhere else where they do not have a connection; and 'deflection' wherein they are advised to return 'home' but are not provided with support to do so.

- National guidance outlining agreed good practice exists, but implementation often deviates from this quite substantially. Resource and time pressures dictate that assessments of rough sleepers' connections and support needs are often extremely limited. Furthermore, support is in some cases intensive and tailored; but in the greater majority of cases is minimal.

- In practice, connections are almost always assessed in terms of the *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities* 'local connection' criteria. In some places, the last place of settled residence (where someone has lived for six out of the last 12 months or three out of the last five years) is regarded as 'trumps' and other criteria have little influence; in others weighting is given to other forms of local connection (e.g. having adult family members living in the area).

- Outcomes are only recorded in a small minority of cases. The limited data available suggest that reconnection experiences and outcomes vary dramatically, from positive (e.g. accessing accommodation and re-engaging with support services) to negative (e.g. sleeping rough in the recipient area because the services offered are of poor quality or time limited).

- Practitioners generally agree that reconnection is wholly appropriate and potentially beneficial in some circumstances, most notably where rough sleepers have made an unplanned move and abandoned 'live' supportive connections or services in so doing. Positive outcomes are more likely when good practice principles are adhered to, but are by no means guaranteed.

- The limits and risks associated with reconnection raise significant ethical questions, especially as regards: denial of services to rough sleepers with no recognised local connection anywhere in the UK; uncertainty regarding the legitimacy and/or severity of risk to rough sleepers in recipient areas (especially when no proof in the form of police records exist); inadequate service responses in some recipient areas; and the fragility or lack of support networks in recipient areas.

- These ethical dilemmas are most acute when reconnection is employed as a 'single service offer', wherein rough sleepers who refuse to comply are denied access to homelessness services in the identifying area.

- These issues are profoundly important given indications that some local authorities are beginning to regard all single homeless people (not just rough sleepers) as potential reconnection cases and/or are tightening local connection criteria. If such trends are indicative of a more widespread 'raising of drawbridges' under localism it may become increasingly difficult for single homeless people to provide evidence of connections and access services.

Background to the study

'Reconnection', defined in policy terms as "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" (Homeless Link, 2014b, p.3), has become an increasingly prevalent feature of rough sleeping strategies within England in recent years. The policy emphasis on reconnection escalated especially rapidly after the inception and nationwide rollout of No Second Night Out principles (CLG, 2011).

The increased strategic emphasis on reconnection has largely occurred in the absence of robust evidence regarding the impacts on rough sleepers, however. This study aimed to begin to redress this gap in evidence, by documenting the rationale underpinning the utilisation of reconnection, examining the ways it is articulated 'on the ground', and assessing its impact on rough sleepers. Both 'indigenous' and migrant rough sleepers are affected by reconnection, but this study restricted focus to the former, that is, British nationals reconnected within the UK.

The study involved national key informant interviews *(n=6)* and evaluations of reconnection schemes in four (anonymised) case study areas. The locations were purposively sampled to provide insight into different policies and practices in a range of geographic contexts. They included a central London borough, a seaside town, and cities in the North and East of England. Case study methods included: collation of relevant statistics; interviews with local key informants (e.g. service providers and local authority representatives) (total *n=12*); focus groups and interviews with frontline support workers (total *n=31*); and interviews with rough sleepers targeted for and/or with experience of reconnection (total *n=44* individuals).

To maximise clarity, the local authority and service providers in the area within which rough sleepers are targeted for reconnection (that is, the places they are reconnected *from*) are referred to in the report as 'identifying' authorities/agencies; those in the places that rough sleepers are reconnected *to* are referred to as 'recipient' authorities or agencies. The term 'domestic' reconnection is employed to distinguish reconnections involving moves within the UK from 'international' reconnections involving moves abroad.

The development of and rationale underpinning reconnection policies

Reconnection was first used as a tool to combat rough sleeping in central London in the mid 2000s, has subsequently been endorsed in national policy guidance, and now features widely in local authority policy across England, albeit that the exact extent of its utilisation remains unknown. The earliest iterations focused on rough sleepers, but there is some evidence that the remit of reconnection is being expanded to single homeless people more generally in some places, that is, it is being considered as a response for all single homeless people without a proven connection in the identifying local authority, regardless of whether they have slept rough.

There is significant variation in the definitions and approach employed at the local level, but all reconnection polices are underpinned by essentially the same rationale, these being aspirations to: prioritise the needs of 'local' rough sleepers in the context of restricted resources; force other local authorities to take responsibility for 'their' rough sleepers; reduce the potential for rough sleepers to become involved in damaging street lifestyles; and improve outcomes for rough sleepers by supporting them to move to areas where they are assumed to have access to informal social support and/or formal support services.

National guidance (Homeless Link, 2014b) provides a detailed account of what is widely agreed to be good practice in reconnection. This, and the local case study policies reviewed, all emphasise that reconnection should not be employed as a response for all rough sleepers, without exception stating that it is inappropriate when individuals are known to be fleeing from domestic violence or are at proven risk of harm where they have an established connection. Furthermore some, but not all, local policies state that exemptions should also apply if individuals have very high support needs and/or have lived such transient lifestyles that they do not have a meaningful connection to any local authority area.

The scale of reconnections and profile of rough sleepers targeted

Data regarding the prevalence of reconnections, and profile of individuals affected, are extremely limited, especially outside London. That said, the data available suggest that inter-city reconnections, that is, the reconnection of British nationals from one urban centre to another within the UK, comprise the majority of reconnections from some areas. In London, these are outnumbered by international reconnections (involving moves abroad) and intra-city reconnections (from one borough to another).

Outside London, domestic (within-UK) reconnections typically involve the return of rough sleepers to neighbouring local authorities or another jurisdiction within the same administrative region; reconnections involving greater distances are less common, and returns to other UK nations (i.e. Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland) are comparatively rare.

The rough sleepers targeted for reconnection broadly resemble the general rough sleeping population in demographic profile. A significant minority have support needs

associated with substance misuse and/or mental health problems.

Existing data indicate that the support provided to rough sleepers in the lead-up to and during domestic reconnection is, in the majority of cases, limited. Another striking finding is that outcomes are recorded for only a very small minority of cases, if at all. Very little is thus known about the impacts of reconnection on rough sleepers' housing, health and other circumstances in either the short- or long-term.

Reconnection practice and implementation challenges

In practice, reconnection is an umbrella term used in reference to a range of general approaches. These can be broadly classified as:

i) *'Reconnection (proper)'*, that is, reconnection in the truest sense of the term, which involves supporting rough sleepers to return to a place where they have some established link – typically their most recent settled place of residence – as assessed and verified by a support worker. The level and nature of support provided varies but generally involves, at minimum, obtaining confirmation from the receiving local authority or voluntary sector agency that the individual will be eligible for accommodation and/or other support services. This process may (but does not always) involve negotiation with recipient authorities or agencies to secure an offer of support and, in some cases, accompanying the homeless person to the recipient area to oversee the handover of care.

ii) *'Diversion'* (sometimes referred to as 'relocation'), essentially involves

connecting (*cf. re*connecting) rough sleepers, that is, encouraging or supporting them to access services somewhere outwith the identifying area where they do not have an established connection. Targeted individuals are referred to voluntary sector service providers whom do not employ local connection eligibility criteria and therefore accept homeless people from outside the area (see below). Proponents justify diversion on grounds that it is better for rough sleepers without a local connection to the identifying area to access accommodation in the recipient area even though they have no connection there either than it is to sleep rough where they are ineligible for services. Support workers usually (but not always) check that the receiving service(s) have capacity to accept the rough sleeper and provide travel funds, but do not accompany them on the journey.

iii) *'Deflection'* is perhaps the most appropriate term to describe practices regarded to be a light touch form of 'advised reconnection' in some places. In such instances, 'new' rough sleepers who are not from the identifying area are informed (often by frontline police officers) that they cannot access services in the area and should (or must) return to their home area. No formal assessment of their support needs or connections elsewhere is made, nor is there any attempt to signpost or broker access to support services in the receiving area. Deflected rough sleepers may or may not be offered a ticket or travel warrant to fund their journey.

Connections are almost always defined in practice in terms of the 'local connection'

criteria outlined in the *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities* (CLG, 2006b). These are used as a 'blunt' tool, largely employed in a blanket fashion, to assess whether a rough sleeper has a local connection to the identifying area (and is therefore eligible for local authority funded homelessness services); and, if not, to identify another where they do and attempt to reconnect them there. In some local authority areas, the last place of settled residence, this being where an individual has lived for six out of the last twelve months or three out of the last five years, is regarded as 'trumps' and other criteria are rarely considered; in others, weighting is given to other forms of local connection, such as having (adult) family members living in the area.

The process of reconnection typically emphasises the discomfort and dangers associated with rough sleeping and/or the potential benefits of returning to the recipient area. Further to this, in all case study areas rough sleepers were denied access to local authority funded services (e.g. hostels and day centres) if they failed to comply with a reconnection offer (which was sometimes presented as a 'single service offer'). The balance between these techniques varied at the local level, as did the intensity of support provided: the latter ranging from intensive assessment of needs and brokering of support in the recipient area at one extreme, to virtually nothing (aside from the provision of a travel warrant) at the other.

Stakeholders frequently liken reconnection to a 'game of chicken' or a 'Mexican standoff' between reconnectors and potential reconnectees, wherein both parties hold their ground until one or other capitulates. Importantly, service providers will always 'give in' and provide services if a rough sleeper refuses to be reconnected and their wellbeing visibly deteriorates whilst they remain on the streets. Rough sleepers with complex support needs are usually (but not always) exempted from reconnection

policies. Resource constrains dictate that only a minority of reconnected individuals are 'checked up on' after the move.

Stakeholders identify a number of barriers to reconnection, including: reticence or inability on the part of recipient local authorities to provide services for reconnected rough sleepers; the actions of non-interventionist support agencies (e.g. night shelters and soup kitchens) which are not signed up to associated protocols and are said to undermine reconnection policies; and resistance on the part of rough sleepers.

Reconnection experiences and outcomes

Rough sleepers reported that their moves to the places where they were targeted for reconnection were generally prompted by a combination of: firstly, push factors, typically broken relationships and/or perceived risk of harm in the area they have left (e.g. due to drug debt); and secondly, pull factors, which generally include perceptions regarding the safety, anonymity, camaraderie, opportunity and availability of services within, and/or fond associations with, their destination. In a minority of cases, rough sleepers had been directed to the identifying area after having been told by local authority officers in their 'home' area that there were no emergency homelessness services available locally or that they were not entitled to access them.

A distinction can be made between the experiences of individuals affected by intra-city reconnections, that is, reconnections from one London borough to another, and inter-city reconnections, that is, moves from one town/city to another. Rough sleepers experiencing an intra-city move generally did not view it as reconnection *per se*, but rather considered the process to offer valuable personalised advocacy assisting them to access accommodation and other services to which they were entitled in their

'home' borough. In most such cases they greatly appreciated the support provided by reconnection workers, albeit that they often reported feeling 'in limbo' during lengthy negotiations with recipient authorities.

Inter-city reconnectees, on the other hand, generally reported being confused, upset and/or angry at the prospect of reconnection, in part due to lack of clarity regarding local connection assessment criteria, but most commonly because of the primacy accorded to last place of settled residence and comparative lack of recognition given to the presence of family in local connection assessments. Levels of anger and anxiety were most acute amongst those who believed they would be at risk of harm if they returned but had no formal (police) evidence because they had not reported violence or threats thereof in the recipient area.

Whilst it was not possible to quantify precisely what proportion of rough sleepers experienced specific outcomes, those undergoing inter-city reconnection tended to follow one of four general response trajectories, in that they would either: i) comply with the reconnection offer, move to and remain in the recipient area; ii) comply with the reconnection offer and move to the recipient area but subsequently return to the identifying area; iii) refuse the reconnection offer and remain street homeless in the identifying area; or iv) refuse to be reconnected and make accommodation arrangements independently.

A number of reconnected individuals did sleep rough in the recipient area, even if only for a short time, given the inadequacy or unpalatability of services they were referred to. Further to this, the ability of those whom made alternative arrangements was, inevitably, contingent on them having the capabilities, confidence and/or contacts (e.g. family) to do so. Also notably, the individuals who were diverted questioned the logic underpinning the intervention, and whilst

their immediate accommodation needs were met, they remained ineligible for settled accommodation given their lack of local connection in the recipient area.

It is not clear what, if any, impact reconnection policies and practice has had on the overall prevalence of rough sleeping, given difficulty disentangling their influence from that of other factors affecting the scale and nature of street homelessness in recent years (e.g. changing migration patterns, welfare reform, the economic recession, housing shortage etc.).

Appropriateness, effectiveness, limits and risks

There is widespread agreement amongst practitioners that reconnection is wholly appropriate in some circumstances, most notably where rough sleepers have made an unplanned move to an identifying area and abandoned 'live' connections or services in the recipient area. Stakeholders did however highlight a number of significant ethical issues associated with reconnection, including amongst others: concerns about the adequacy of needs assessments and levels of support provided in identifying areas; insufficient service responses in some recipient areas; the potential risk of harm to some rough sleepers if they return; and questions around the ethicality of denying people who refuse to be reconnected access to accommodation and other basic services.

Rough sleeper interviewees typically interpreted reconnections as an attempt on the part of local authorities to avoid taking responsibility for vulnerable individuals. This had had the unintended negative consequence of strengthening the resolve of many to 'dig their heels in' and refuse to engage. That said, rough sleepers generally agreed that reconnection was justifiable in situations where rough sleepers had abandoned legitimate connections (e.g.

positive family support and/or services in their home area), were returning voluntarily, were not at risk of harm should they return, and were provided with sufficient support before, during and after the reconnection process. They universally and resolutely believed that no-one should be 'forced' to return to an area where they felt that they would be at risk of physical or psychological harm, however.

The evaluation confirmed that reconnections are most likely to be effective when: rough sleepers' connections to the recipient area are meaningful; they have a (recent) history of service use in the recipient area; targeted individuals are newly homeless or recent arrivals; time is invested in brokering support in the recipient area; targeted individuals are given choice regarding where and how they are reconnected; and/or the reconnection offer is presented in a positive manner. Conversely, reconnection appears least likely to work when: rough sleepers are resistant to the idea of returning; targeted individuals have a long history of homelessness; insufficient support is provided before, during and/or after the reconnection; and/or recipient areas are geographically very distant from identifying areas.

The evaluation also highlighted a number of limits and risks associated with reconnections. These included: the denial of essential services to rough sleepers with no local connection anywhere in the UK (most commonly those who had lived overseas for more than three years); uncertainty regarding the legitimacy and/or severity of risk to rough sleepers in recipient areas; the complexity of and difficulty assessing rough sleepers' reasons for moving; inadequate service responses in recipient areas; the potential for exacerbating rough sleepers' resistance to support services; and the fragility or lack of social support networks in recipient areas.

Conclusion and recommendations

The study has revealed that whilst reconnection is a justifiable intervention which has the potential to generate positive outcomes in some circumstances, there is a disjuncture between recognised good practice and the way in which reconnection is often implemented 'on the ground'. Deviations from the core principles of reconnection endorsed in national guidance (Homeless Link, 2014b) are most marked in instances of diversion, which is (perhaps surprisingly) more palatable than reconnection to some rough sleepers, but where outcomes are consistently poorer. Questions also remain over the justifiability of deflections, especially given the dearth of evidence regarding the characteristics of, and outcomes for, those affected.

Reconnection outcomes are more likely to be positive when rough sleepers are willing to return, connections are meaningful and high quality tailored support is provided in both identifying and recipient areas. Many homeless people are very resistant to the intervention, however, especially if they believe they may be at risk of harm in the recipient area and/or the services offered are of poor quality or provide only a short-term solution to their housing and other needs. In such circumstances, targeted individuals typically remain in or return to rough sleeping, be that in the identifying or recipient area.

The evaluation has highlighted a number of key tensions, dissonances and ethical issues inherent within reconnection policy and practice. Many of these are particularly acute when reconnections are employed as part of a single service offer, given the potential for non-compliance to render targeted individuals ineligible for services in the identifying area. These issues and concerns include but are not limited to:

- the erroneous presumption, strongly voiced in reconnections policy rhetoric, that rough sleepers have positive social

support networks in their last place of residence;

- the rigid prioritisation of last place of normal residence by some local authorities in assessments of local connection, such that legitimate positive support networks elsewhere may be (and sometimes are) overlooked;

- profound difficulties assessing the legitimacy and severity of risks to rough sleepers in recipient areas and potential implications of getting such assessments wrong;

- the reliance on non-interventionist services (e.g. night shelters and soup kitchens) to meet the essential living needs of individuals who refuse reconnection, when such agencies are simultaneously criticised for undermining reconnection policies; and

- the denial of services to rough sleepers who do not have any local connection as defined in the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities (most notably those who have been living outside the UK for longer than three years).

These issues are particularly significant given that evidence regarding the impacts of reconnection remains extremely limited. Further to this, some councils are tightening their local connection criteria such that it will be increasingly difficult for rough sleepers to provide evidence of a connection. These trends inevitably raise questions about the potential implications for reconnections policy, and the provision of services to single homeless people more generally. Particularly if they are indicative of a general trend toward a 'raising of drawbridges' by local authorities across the country.

A much broader debate needs to be had as regards the appropriateness of using the *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local*

Authorities local connection criteria to restrict rough sleepers' eligibility for accommodation and other building based services. Furthermore, both receiving and identifying local authorities need to be reminded of their duties of care toward single homeless people (as regards the provision of meaningful and appropriate advice and assistance, at least).

Those important issues notwithstanding, and given the likelihood of reconnection remaining as a policy response to street homelessness, recommendations emerging from the study include the following:

- *Who* should be reconnected? Reconnection can be appropriate, and potentially beneficial, when rough sleepers have recently made an unplanned move and/or abandoned 'live' connections or support services. Caution is however necessary when considering whether it is appropriate to reconnect individuals with complex support needs and/or long histories of street homelessness. Particularly, given that they are unlikely to have existing (positive) support networks to link into and are likely to be resistant even if presented with a single service offer. Furthermore, reconnection should not be pursued with individuals for whom there are reasonable grounds to believe that they will be at risk of harm should they return. Even if there is no 'proof' in the form of police records, evidence via contact with other agencies in the recipient area should be considered substantial.

- *Where* should they be reconnected? Reconnection should generally only be pursued when rough sleepers have meaningful connections, in the form of prior service use and/or the presence of positive social support networks. Targeted individuals' views and preferences as to where they have connections should not be over-ridden by rigidly enforced local connection criterion. The appropriateness of the support should be rigorously

assessed by reconnection workers. Further to this, rough sleepers' last place of settled residence should not automatically be given precedence over other legitimate forms of connection; rather, social support (especially family networks) should be taken into consideration if appropriate.

- *How* should they be reconnected? Agreed good practice, already published in national guidance (Homeless Link, 2014b), should be adhered to much more consistently than it is at present. There is a case for introducing a national standard for reconnection, given the incidence of poor practice. This should insist that all reconnected individuals be offered a minimum level of support, sufficiently resourced, before, during and after the reconnection process. Referrals to poor quality or insecure (time-limited) accommodation settings should be avoided insofar as possible.

- *Data collection:* rough sleepers and named contacts in recipient agencies/authorities should be followed up after every reconnection as standard procedure and outcomes recording improved significantly. This would not only serve to protect against potential negative impacts but also improve the currently weak evidence base on reconnection outcomes. Suitable funding should be allocated to allow local authorities to do this.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the study

As the most extreme and publicly 'visible' form of homelessness, rough sleeping has been high on the policy agenda for many years in England (Jones and Johnsen, 2009). National strategies developed by the former New Labour and current Coalition Government have been underpinned by an aim to reduce or eliminate street homelessness and/or the 'need to sleep rough', and significant resources have been invested in setting up specialist, coordinated services for street homeless people in most urban areas (CLG, 2008, 2011).

'Reconnection' has become an increasingly prevalent feature of rough sleeping strategies in recent years, especially since Central Government called on local authorities to consider introducing reconnection policies as part of a coordinated approach to reducing rough sleeping (CLG, 2006). Reconnection is defined at the national level as "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" (Homeless Link, 2014b, p.3). Proponents endorse reconnection on grounds that the individuals targeted are reconnected "back to their own area where they have more social capital and more chance of qualifying for accommodation" (NSNO, 2011, p.4).

The policy emphasis on reconnection has escalated in recent years, largely due to the inception and expansion of 'No Second Night Out' (NSNO) which was developed by the London Delivery Board as part of its strategy to ensure that no-one should spend more than one night on the streets of the capital (NSNO, 2011). In essence, NSNO aims to ensure that rough sleepers are helped off the streets as quickly as possible, so they do not become 'trapped' on the streets where they are vulnerable to becoming a victim of crime and/or are at significant risk of experiencing a deterioration in their physical or mental health (Homeless Link, 2014c; NSNO, 2011). Reconnection comprises one of five key NSNO principles[1], this being that:

> *"If people have come from another area or country and find themselves sleeping rough, the aim should be to reconnect them back to their local community unless there is a good reason why they cannot return. There, they will be able to access housing and recovery services, and have support from family and friends."*
> (Homeless Link, 2014a, p.6)

Local authorities across England pledged to adopt NSNO principles following publication of the first report from the Coalition Government's ministerial working group to tackle homelessness (CLG, 2011). This process was aided by a £20 million Homelessness Transition Fund (HTF) under which more than 150 grants had been awarded by the end of 2013 (Homeless Link, 2014c). A total of 69 local authorities have signed up to NSNO principles, albeit that the extent to which and ways in which they have developed new or modified existing services has varied depending on levels of need and resource availability at the local level (Homeless Link, 2014c). A recent snapshot survey of NSNO development and operation in 20 areas outside of London indicates that the majority employ reconnections, with 89% of respondents reporting that reconnections was employed in NSNO service delivery in their area (Homeless Link, 2014c). The increased utilisation of and strategic

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1   Other NSNO principles include: 1) new rough sleepers should be identified and helped off the streets immediately; 2) members of the public should be able to play an active role by reporting and referring rough sleepers; 3) rough sleepers should be helped to access a place of safety where their needs can be quickly assessed and they can receive advice about their options; 4) rough sleepers should be able to access emergency accommodation and other services such as healthcare if needed (Homeless Link, 2014a).

emphasis placed on reconnection is however occurring in the absence of a robust evidence base regarding the impacts on rough sleepers affected. The NSNO pilot evaluation in London reported that one quarter of those clients who had been reconnected were known to be still in accommodation in their reconnection area three months later, but that no outcomes were recorded for the other 75% of such clients (Hough et al., 2011). Furthermore, whilst Homeless Link (2014c) conclude that NSNO services 'work' because 78% of rough sleepers assisted outside London in 2012/13 were not recorded as sleeping rough again,[2] their snapshot survey (see above) did not collate information about post-reconnection outcomes for those affected.

The evidence base as regards the implementation and effectiveness of reconnection schemes is thus very weak at the present point in time. This study aimed to go some way in redressing this gap in evidence, by documenting the rationale underpinning the utilisation (and contestation) of reconnections approaches, examining the various ways that it is articulated 'on the ground', and assessing its impact on rough sleepers.

1.2 Research questions and scope

The study focussed on the following key questions:

- How are reconnections services implemented in practice? What is the balance of supportive and enforcement interventions within these schemes?

- How is the effectiveness and ethicality of reconnections approaches perceived by key local stakeholders such as homelessness service providers and local authorities?

- How are reconnections services experienced by rough sleepers, and what are their views on their ethicality and effectiveness?

Both 'indigenous' and migrant rough sleepers are affected by reconnection, but this study restricted its focus to the former, that is, British nationals reconnected within the UK. This limitation was defined in part for logistical and resource reasons given the challenges involved in tracking outcomes for migrants reconnected overseas, but also in expectation that many of the key 'lessons learned' in the implementation of 'domestic' reconnections will be relevant for international reconnections also.

In order to maximise clarity throughout the report, the local authority and service providers in the area within which rough sleepers are targeted for reconnection (that is, the places they are reconnected *from*) are referred to as 'identifying' authorities/agencies; those in the places that rough sleepers are reconnected *to* are referred to as 'recipient' authorities or agencies. The term 'domestic' reconnection is employed to distinguish reconnections involving moves within the UK from 'international' reconnections involving moves abroad.

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2   This was true for a greater proportion (86%) of rough sleepers assisted by NSNO in London (Homeless Link, 2014b).

1.3 Research methods

The study involved two main stages. First, a series of *national key informant interviews* was conducted with six major stakeholders within the homelessness sector, to explore the 'drivers' behind and characteristics of reconnections schemes for rough sleepers within and beyond London, any challenges encountered in their implementation, evidence regarding outcomes, and rationale used to justify and/or oppose reconnection at the national level. National key informant interviewees included representatives of Central Government, campaigning agencies, national umbrella bodies and key service providers.

Second, a detailed *evaluation of reconnection schemes* was conducted in four case study areas, purposively sampled to provide insight into different reconnection policies and practices (some of which were supported by HTF funding, some of which were not) in a range of geographic contexts across England. In order to preserve their anonymity, these locations are henceforth referred to as 'London Borough', 'Eastern City', 'Northern City' and 'Seaside Town'. In each of these case study locations the following fieldwork was conducted:

- *Collation of relevant statistics* regarding the number of reconnections conducted, characteristics of individuals affected, and outcomes (where recorded).

- *Interviews with local key informants*, including senior representatives from homelessness service providers and the local authority (total *n=12*), to explore the rationale underpinning, practice, and perceived effectiveness of local reconnections policy.

- *Focus groups and interviews with frontline workers* from homelessness services and other agencies involved in the delivery of reconnections (involving total *n=31* individuals). Vignettes, or hypothetical scenarios, were used to facilitate discussion regarding the practices, perceived appropriateness (or inappropriateness), and likely outcomes of reconnection in different circumstances[3].

- *Interviews with rough sleepers* who had been targeted for and/or had experience of reconnection (total *n=49* interviews). These included a mix of people whom were interviewed at the point they were first targeted as a potential reconnection case (*n=30*), some after they had been reconnected (*n=9*), and others at both time points (i.e. before and after being reconnected) (*n=5*), as shown in Figure 1. The vast majority of rough sleeper interviewees were male (only four were female), and most were aged between 20 and 45.

It should be noted that the approach adopted in terms of interviewing rough sleeper participants was adapted part-way through the study in light of significant challenges encountered in (re)contacting individuals after they had been reconnected. The original intention had been to employ a longitudinal approach by interviewing all homeless participants at the point they were targeted for reconnection (wave one) and then again six months later (wave two). Practical difficulties following up individuals after reconnection[4] however meant that additional participants (who had not been involved in wave one) were recruited with the assistance of homelessness service

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3   As a research tool, vignettes facilitate comparison of the ways in which individual cases would be dealt with in different places and are shaped by local policy, service availability and so on. Being hypothetical, they also offer a 'safe space' within which sensitive issues can be explored, and assist in opening up broader conversations about the moral reasoning used to justify (or not) actions in given circumstances (Finch, 1987; Schoenberg and Ravdal, 2000).

4   Multiple attempts were made to telephone rough sleeper participants as necessary, and any additional contacts (e.g. email addresses or the details of support workers etc.) provided at the first interview followed up. In a significant proportion of cases, however, participants were un-contactable because telephone numbers had changed, they did not utilise email, and/or named support agencies no longer had up-to-date contact details for them etc.

Figure 1: Number and timing of interviews with rough sleepers

When targeted
(wave 1) only

Both waves
1 and 2

After intervention
(wave 2) only
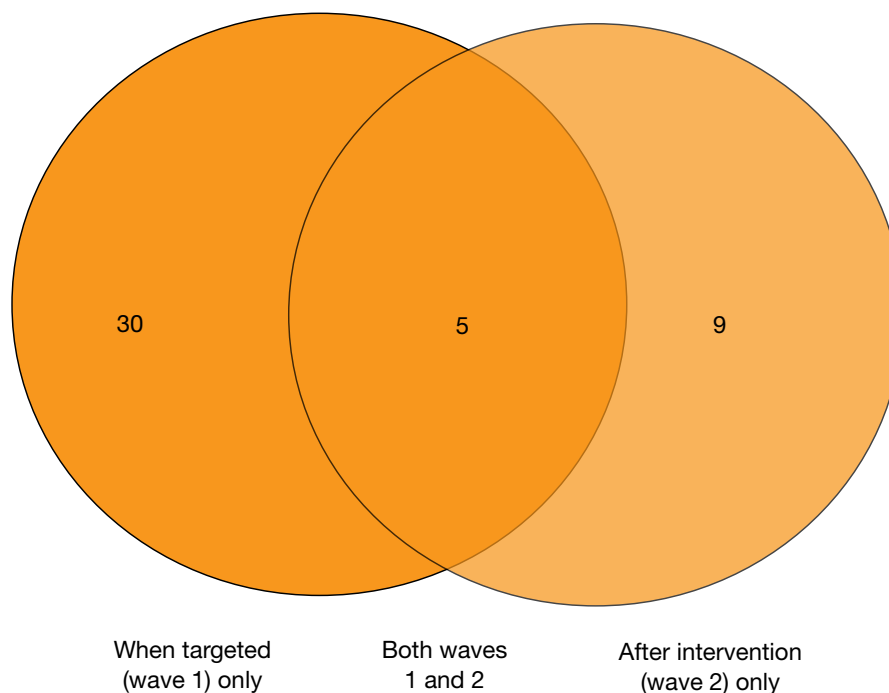
providers and interviewed retrospectively, that is, after they had been reconnected[5]. The difficulties encountered resonated strongly with the experiences described by reconnection worker interviewees in relation to their attempts to re-contact service users following reconnection (see Chapter 4). They also highlight the challenges involved in attempts, and ongoing need, to strengthen the evidence base on reconnection outcomes (see Chapter 7).

The vast majority of interviews were conducted face-to-face, but some were conducted via telephone when face-to-face interviews were not possible logistically (as was the case for all follow-up and retrospective interviews with reconnected rough sleepers). All interviews were audio recorded with the permission of interviewees,

transcribed verbatim, and analysed thematically. Individuals who were targeted for or had experience of reconnection were given £15 high street shopping vouchers after each interview as a gesture of thanks for their participation. A breakdown of the number of interviews conducted in each case study location is provided in Appendix A. Where used in this report, all names are pseudonyms.

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5   In each case, homelessness agencies contacted rough sleepers whom had been reconnected and asked them whether they would be willing to participate in this study. Where theyreceived a positive response, the contact details of service users were passed onto the research team. Interviews revealed that these individuals had a mix of positive and negative experiences of reconnection, thus assuaging any potential concerns about 'cherry picking' by support agencies.

1.4 Report outline

This report consists of seven chapters. The next, Chapter 2, traces the history of, and rationale underpinning, the development of reconnection as a response to rough sleeping at the national and local levels. Chapter 3 reviews existing statistics on the scale of reconnection and profile of individuals affected. Chapter 4 discusses the practical implementation of reconnection 'on the ground' and service provider reflections regarding its effectiveness and appropriateness. Chapter 5 focuses on the outcomes of reconnection policies, including rough sleepers' experiences and perceptions of these. The penultimate chapter, Chapter 6, reviews the overall effectiveness, limits and risks associated with reconnection policies. The report concludes in Chapter 7 by reflecting on the key findings and implications of the study.

2. The development of and rationale underpinning reconnection policies

This chapter traces the development of and 'drivers' underpinning reconnection polices at the national and local levels in England. It draws upon national key informant interviews, interviews with key stakeholders, and national and local level strategy/policy documents in each of the four case study areas.

2.1 The history of reconnection policy development

2.1.1 Early origins and the pan-London protocol

The inception of reconnection as a policy response to rough sleeping can be traced to Westminster, central London, in the mid 2000s. Persistently high levels of street homelessness during the 1990s and early 2000s despite significant investment in service responses, together with evidence that a significant proportion of rough sleepers contacted by outreach teams had no explicit connection to the borough, prompted the City of Westminster council to consider ways of linking rough sleepers back to their 'home area'. Westminster's adoption of reconnection soon led to the development of the *Pan London Protocol for New Rough Sleepers* which aimed to facilitate the rapid linking back of rough sleepers to services in their home area and was agreed by the London Councils Housing Forum in 2006 (London Councils, 2006).

The pan-London protocol asserts that the majority of those new to the streets in the centre of London did not become homeless there, "but rather became homeless elsewhere, left that area and came into the centre of London to sleep rough" (London Councils, 2006, p.1). It goes on to argue that the in order to prevent 'crisis' rough sleeping from developing into 'entrenched' rough sleeping what is needed is a "rapid and

comprehensive intervention that results in their immediate short term accommodation and their being assisted with their re-establishing themselves in longer term stable accommodation". Notably, it emphasises that "individuals are most likely to re-establish themselves in stable accommodation in the *area with which they are most familiar and have the greatest social ties e.g. the area in which they wield the greatest social capital*"(London Councils, 2006, p.1, emphasis added).

The approach was justified on grounds that "while an individual is at liberty, using their own resources, to move from one area to another, they may also legitimately find themselves not qualifying for services in that area until they have established some measure of residency" (London Councils, 2006, p.2). The protocol also notes that reconnection is inappropriate for some rough sleepers, including individuals with Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) preventing them from returning to specific areas, those who will be 'at risk' if they return, or those with no 'meaningful connection' to any area. It also notes that the most 'chaotic' rough sleepers with complex support needs fall outside the remit of reconnection, given that they may have no 'functional links' to any area and that any attempt to reconnect them is likely to fail (London Councils, 2006).

The document does not define explicitly what is meant by the term 'reconnection', nor indeed what a 'connection' itself might entail. As regards the home area or place(s) in which a rough sleeper is from, or has a connection, the protocol states that:

"It is not practical to establish a tight definition for what constitutes the area to which someone has most recently had a sustained attachment, establishing this

requires an element of judgement … The key criteria in making this judgement are identifying where they have had stable accommodation or employment, where they have been claiming benefits or where they have been engaged with health, probationary or social services."
(London Councils, 2006, pp. 2-3)

The protocol distinguishes between five different subgroups of rough sleepers, defined for the most part by their level of support needs, and suggests that a tiered approach be employed, as summarised in Table 2.1. The responses outlined range from a facilitated return not involving negotiation with the receiving authority (that is, the council in the destination location) in the cases of individuals with low or no support needs, through to more intensive liaison with local authorities in recipient areas in cases where medium or high level support needs have been identified. As Table 2.1 notes, the protocol had intended that each local authority would have a named officer to deal with cases being reconnected into their borough, but stakeholder interviewees report that this element was never implemented.

Table 2.1: Pan-London reconnection protocol tiers

Tier	Identifying authority's response	Receiving authority's response
1. Low/no support needs. Person recognises that they had made a mistake in leaving home area with insufficient planning/ resources and wishes to return	Facilitate returned with immediate effect, providing means of transport if necessary. No requirement to negotiate with local authority at returning location	To have in place clearly signposted and readily accessible services to advise and assist this group with accessing accommodation and an identified officer to act as a single point of contact for those seeking reconnection
2. Low/medium support needs	Following triage, offer a time-limited (seven days max.) full Needs Led Assessment (NLA)	To respond constructively to any approach from the identifying authority to participate in formulating an action plan for the reconnection of these clients
3. Medium/high support needs	Offer full NLA. Full negotiations must take place with the service providers in receiving local authority	To respond urgently to an approach from the identifying authority to participate in the client's NLA and in collaboration with the identifying borough facilitate a planned return to services and accommodation
4. Client in temporary accommodation but wishes to be reconnected to their home area	Negotiate with the receiving local authority and relevant local services; if possible, should entail a move to more permanent accommodation if a move to another hostel is inappropriate	To respond constructively to any approach from the identifying borough. To participate in action planning for the clients' return to their home area, despite their currently being housed outside the borough
5. High levels of vulnerability, but no demonstrable connection to any local area or engagement with services	Full NLA leading to formulation and delivery of care plan	No response required; clients fall outside the sphere of reconnection

Source: Adapted from London Councils (2006, p.6)

2.1.2 National-level guidance

Shortly after publication of the pan-London protocol, following consultation with local authorities and voluntary sector service providers, Communities and Local Government (CLG) developed an outline framework, titled *Getting Connected: Guidelines for Operating Reconnections Policies for Rough Sleepers* (CLG, 2006). This document offered good practice guidelines for local authorities outside London to develop reconnections polices as part of a rough sleeping strategy, and called upon them to develop a locally-agreed protocol with key stakeholders to foster robust and reciprocally agreed referral mechanisms. The outline framework was the first report to formally define the purpose of reconnection as being "to allow rough sleepers, particularly new arrivals, to return in a planned way to an area where they have accommodation, support networks or some other connection" (CLG, 2006, p.1). In line with the pan-London protocol, the outline framework reiterates that there are instances where reconnection would be inappropriate; it also confirmed that reconnections should not be applied where a local authority has accepted a duty to secure accommodation for a rough sleeper or single homeless person under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 (CLG, 2006).

Significantly, as was true of the pan-London protocol, the CLG outline framework does not define explicitly what constitutes a 'connection', nor suggest how this should be evidenced or investigated. It also highlighted the fact that concerns had already been raised within Government "that some policies adopted by local authorities and their partner agencies could deny vulnerable people who do not have a connection to the area access to hostels/shelters and support services" and thus called upon authorities developing reconnection protocols to "bear in mind that the Government's target to reduce rough sleeping is a national one" (CLG, 2006, p.1). Central Government representative interviewees emphasised that reconnection

was never intended to be a 'default' response to rough sleeping, but rather:

> *"The proviso always was that it has to be someone for whom reconnection is an effective option. If someone doesn't come from anywhere or if they're so damaged and have been on the streets for so long that there's very little chance of them reigniting old networks in terms of friendships or family or whatever, then the receiving authority has to take the responsibility, and that was the bottom line in terms of the original reconnections protocol..."*
> (National key informant)

On this issue, the CLG outline framework states that when assessing whether reconnection is appropriate in individual cases, support providers should:

- carry out an assessment of the individual's housing and support needs;

- identify if it is safe for the person to return to another area;

- obtain consent from the client;

- notify the receiving authority/housing provider to ensure that accommodation and/or other support services are available for the client in the receiving authority;

- agree arrangements to facilitate the transfer;

- arrange and fund travel and any associated costs;

- where possible, accompany the person to the train/bus station;

- advise the receiving authority that the clients is en route;

- follow up by checking the client arrived safely (CLG, 2006).

Building upon the outline framework (CLG, 2006), and drawing upon the recent experiences of NSNO programmes (Homeless Link, 2012, 2014b), Homeless Link subsequently produced guidance on best practice in reconnection implementation. Notably, the most recent of these documents, the *Assessment and Reconnection Toolkit* (Homeless Link, 2014b) departs from the preceding guidance by referring to 'local connection' (as opposed to simply 'connection'). It notes that the guidance:

> *"…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."* (Homeless Link, 2014b, p.3)

The Homeless Link (2014b) toolkit also states that when implementing reconnection, homelessness services should endeavour to follow a number of principles, these being:

- rapid identification and reconnection of new rough sleepers should be regarded as an important harm reduction measure, ending homelessness before a person's situation deteriorates further;

- reconnection must not be used in isolation and should never just be a ticket home, but rather 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 can include a wide range of interventions, including for example reconnection to family, friends, the private rented sector, supported accommodation projects, local authority temporary accommodation, tied work with accommodation, therapeutic communities, or detoxification/rehabilitation programmes etc.;

- 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;

- 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, albeit that this 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 support and accommodation should be provided in their current area.

As noted in Chapter 1, here has to date been no comprehensive assessment of the proportion of local authorities employing reconnections, and/or the extent to which they are adhere to the principles outlined in the national guidance described above. The snapshot survey recently conducted by

Homeless Link, however, suggests that the vast majority of those outside London signing up to NSNO principles and in receipt of HTF funding report that they employ it to at least some extent in their responses to rough sleeping (Homeless Link, 2014c).

2.2 Reconnection policy at the local level

This section provides an overview of reconnection policy at the local level in each of the four case study areas. Each was reported to have been developed in line with Government strategy and informed by principles set out in the national guidance outlined above, but the operational emphases of each varies to greater or lesser degrees. Specific details regarding the implementation of these policies 'on the ground' are discussed in Chapter 4.

2.2.1 London Borough
Located in central London, London Borough has historically had very high rough sleeper numbers and has utilised reconnection as part of its strategy to tackle rough sleeping for several years. The borough is technically subject to the pan-London reconnection protocol described above, but, as is true in most (if not all) other London boroughs, in practice the definitions, classifications and responses employed do not map directly onto the tiered approach defined in the protocol. The key distinction made is in fact between 'new' rough sleepers, that is, those recorded as being 'new' to the streets of London, and those whom have a (recorded) history of rough sleeping in the capital. The former are assisted via a NSNO 'Hub', wherein staff aim to assess their needs and offer them a 'single service offer' (SSO) within a 72-hour period, albeit in practice this process often takes longer. In cases where rough sleepers have no connection to London Borough, the single service offer will usually entail an offer of reconnection, be that to another borough within the capital or elsewhere in the UK.

Rough sleepers who fall outside the remit of NSNO, that is, those who have a history of rough sleeping in London, are assisted via other street outreach teams and building based services; reconnection will be considered as a potential service response if they do not have a connection to the borough. Those who agree to be reconnected are housed in emergency accommodation (e.g. a night centre) until the reconnection takes place. Individuals who refuse a reconnection SSO are refused access to participating services in the area, albeit that the SSO may be revised if individual circumstances change, for example if their health deteriorates.

A number of local service providers distinguish between 'assisted' and 'supported' reconnections. Assisted reconnections involve liaison with relevant agencies or individuals in the receiving area, provision of a ticket or travel warrant, and development of a written plan; the rough sleeper then makes the journey to and approaches services within the receiving area independently. In supported reconnections, a support worker will accompany the rough sleeper to the receiving area and ensure that they are handed over to relevant services, be that a local authority housing or social services department or other service such as a detox facility, for example. Supported reconnections are commonly experienced by rough sleepers supported via NSNO, but rarely other agencies due to resource constraints (see Chapter 4).

The term 'diversion', or 'advised reconnection', is sometimes used to describe instances wherein police officers or other authorities inform rough sleepers that they cannot access services in the area unless they have a proven local connection and advise them to return to the place they had just arrived from. This sometimes, but not always, involves provision of a travel warrant to fund the journey. Some service providers

also refer to 'self-reconnection' in instances where rough sleepers have been advised to return and are not seen again, based on the assumption that they have returned voluntarily and independently.

2.2.2 Eastern City

Eastern City has historically had a high proportion of people without a local connection amongst its street homeless population, and has employed reconnections as part of its homelessness strategy since 2007. Eastern City Council forms part of a sub-regional cluster consisting of several neighbouring local authorities in south-east England. Its reconnection policy defines reconnection as "the process by which a person who is sleeping rough in the sub-region, and who has no 'local connection' to the sub-region, is helped to secure suitable accommodation either in a local authority area where there is a local connection or else in some other location where they will not need to sleep rough" (Eastern City, 2013, p.2).

In Eastern City a distinction is made between: 'reconnection', which involves supporting someone to return to an area where they have a verified local connection; and 'diversion', this being where rough sleepers are supported to travel to another area that will offer direct access accommodation even if they have no formal connection to that area. The latter strategy is used far more commonly than the former on grounds that it is believed to be more palatable to rough sleepers (see Chapter 4), and typically involves reserving a bed in a night shelter in neighbouring towns which operate a restricted stay and resettlement service. Diversion is justified on grounds that it is better for single homeless people with no local connection to Eastern City to access accommodation in the recipient area, even if they have no connection there, than to sleep rough where they are ineligible for services.

Rough sleepers without a local connection to Eastern City or its sub-region can access local housing services only for as long as

it takes service providers to conduct an assessment and arrange a reconnection or diversion. The council presently aims for this process to take no longer than five days but aims to reduce this to a target of 48 hours. It does however sometimes take much longer. Rough sleepers who may be at risk of violence or harm were they to be returned to their place of local connection are exempt from the policy. The policy states that requests for exemptions should be accompanied by reasonable evidence supporting claims of risk, such as police or former landlord reports.

Rough sleepers who refuse a suitably arranged reconnection may be denied access to housing and related support services in the city or sub-region, except during periods of extreme adverse weather. Any person who returns to rough sleeping in the area within 28 days of an arranged reconnection is not reassessed and cannot access services; those returning more than 28 days after an arranged reconnection are reassessed. Reconnection cases are discussed at a fortnightly forum attended by representatives of the local authority, street outreach team, and other key service providers.

2.2.3   Seaside Town

Seaside Town has had a reconnections policy since 2006, but the local authority has been applying local connection criteria 'more strictly' than many other councils since the early/mid 2000s in an attempt to reduce levels of transience amongst the homeless population in the area. The increased emphasis on local connection was in large part prompted by the fact that in the early 2000s 60 per cent of the town's rough sleepers were from outside the area and levels of provision were insufficient to meet demand from those with a *bona fide* local connection.

Significantly, all single homeless people approaching Seaside Town council for assistance whom do not have an established

local connection are treated as potential reconnections cases, whether or not they have slept rough since arrival. Night shelter accommodation is provided for one night to enable assessment to be undertaken, but further access is denied to individuals who have been told they must return and been offered a travel warrant. Travel warrants are given to people who do not have means to pay for their journey but these are only ever provided on one occasion so as to deter people from making a repeat reappearance.

Emergency accommodation and other support services are provided to rough sleepers if they cannot establish a local connection elsewhere and/or if the individual is especially vulnerable. The street outreach team will continue to work with any individuals who refuse reconnection and advise them how to find private rented sector accommodation, but will continue to attempt to persuade rough sleepers that reconnection is in their best interests nevertheless.

2.2.4   Northern City
The development of reconnection policy in Northern City in the mid 2000s was prompted by the fact that the city did not have enough services to cater for 'its own', that is, rough sleepers with a local connection. Service providers report that the city is regarded as attractive to homeless people in part at least because of the begging opportunities, and the fact that many of the surrounding towns have insufficient (or no) provision for homeless people (see Chapter 5).

In Northern City, local connection assessments of rough sleepers are generally conducted by street outreach team workers, or sometimes Housing Options staff. If an individual is proven to be fleeing violence or is otherwise at risk of harm in the area to which they do have a local connection they are given an 'amnesty' and will be eligible to receive services within Northern City. Amnesties are also employed with entrenched rough sleepers who are deemed

to be especially vulnerable due to high support needs and/or to those who have no local connection anywhere.

All rough sleepers in Northern City are eligible for three nights emergency accommodation whilst assessments are undertaken. Rough sleepers without a local connection who refuse to be reconnected and cannot be accommodated in Northern City are 'relocated' to an area that does not enforce a local connection policy or a service that is willing to take them.

2.3 The driving factors underpinning reconnection

Analysis of reconnection policy documents and interviews with stakeholders at the national and local levels reveal that there are four main factors underpinning or 'driving' the increased emphasis on reconnection as a strategy to combat rough sleeping in England. Each is outlined in turn below.

The first, and arguably the most influential, driving force relates to *resource constraints* in areas with high levels of rough sleeping. In such instances, reconnection is seen as a necessary and pragmatic response which prioritises the needs of 'local' rough sleepers in a context where demand for homelessness services substantially outweighs supply.

> *"I think there's one main driver, which is actually local authorities do not want to be taking responsibility for highly vulnerable people … They're saying, 'Actually, you don't belong to us … You're probably going to need social services; you're probably going to need scripting; you're probably going to need quite complicated health services, and we're going to have to house you, and all of that's going to be very expensive."*
> (National key informant)

> *"It's mainly financial, particularly in [Northern City], which is a beautiful city. People want to be here and if we took everybody on who wanted to be in [Northern City] it would be horrendously expensive and [we would] not be able to maintain it, so it's a way of prioritising how the money is spent on homelessness."*
> (Local key informant, Northern City)

> *"In [Seaside Town] we have a very transient population … People come here, I hear all sorts of reasons, but I do hear a lot 'I used to come here as a child', and then they come here as an adult with issues such as drink, drugs, mental health. They're*
> *then putting more pressure on the town's services…"*
> (Local key informant, Seaside Town)

This issue appears to be particularly acute in places perceived to exert a 'magnet effect' deriving, at least in part, from a concentration of homelessness services (see also Chapter 5). Service providers with a national remit confirmed that frontline workers were less inclined to reconnect rough sleepers from identifying areas where housing shortages were less severe, given the lesser pressure on existing housing stock in the area.

Allied with this, the second driving force is a prerogative to *make other local authorities 'take responsibility for their own'* rough sleepers. On this issue, many interviewees expressed frustration with what might be termed a 'cycle of self-absolution' wherein other local authorities failed to provide services and thus encouraged 'their' rough sleepers to seek services elsewhere, thereby (in theory) absolving themselves of responsibility to provide services because they allegedly 'do not have a rough sleeping problem'.

> *"There is this kind of misunderstanding of, 'Oh that's London they can sort them out, they've got all the services in the world' … I think [London Borough] just frankly woke up and said, 'Oh hold on, financially we can't carry on with this, take some responsibility.' And we're pushing them back … It is that drive for everybody to take more responsibility for their residents."*
> (Local key informant, London Borough)

> *"All local authorities should be made to take responsibility for the homeless within their regions … There are certain local authorities bordering us who claim they don't have a homelessness problem. I've been and taken clients to present themselves as homeless and they just put every barrier possible up…"*
> (Local key informant, Eastern City)

Thirdly, reconnection is said to offer a pragmatic means of *intervening before rough sleepers become established in a street lifestyle*. Reconnection polices aim to reconnect rough sleepers before they integrated into the street 'scene', and the damaging cultures associated with substance misuse in particular, and/or are influenced by ingrained myths regarding service entitlements.

> *"We know that … years on the street take their toll and people die early. So, when it comes down to it if we're really trying to help people sometimes it's that, you've got to be cruel to be kind, and stick to that sense that if rough sleeping is wrong then it's wrong wherever and you have to try and get the solution."*
> (Local key informant, London borough)

> *"When they're at their most vulnerable they can easily get dragged into … international drug markets, all kinds of aspects of the sex industry; things that are just going to destroy people's lives. I'd like to think it makes a difference to say, 'get back and get back now before something really terrible happens', and they're not sucked into the whole culture of rough sleeping and street activity."*
> (National key informant)

The fourth driver underpinning the increasing adoption of reconnection, and that most strongly articulated in associated protocols and guidance (see above), is the *belief that outcomes will be better for rough sleepers* if they are supported in area in which they have 'social capital' and/or are more likely to be entitled to support services.

> *"It's not about saying people can't come to London or wherever … It's about saying, actually, if you come, what you can't do is just come and make yourself vulnerable, and then expect all the pieces to be picked up in this particular place. You will need*

to go and have your problems sorted out where your problems occur, and quite often you can sort them out better where they've occurred, because that's where your track record is and that's where people know you and all the nuances about you."
(National key informant)

> *"The obvious thing is that they've got social capital where they're from so they need to go back there because otherwise they won't be able to access housing and support and everything else because that's the only place you can get that … I think people do run away from things and if they resolve them they are going to have a much better chance of moving forward."*
> (Local key informant, London Borough)

2.4   Conclusion

In tracing the history of domestic reconnections policy in the UK, this chapter has indicated that it has been used as a tool to combat rough sleeping in central London since the mid 2000s, was subsequently endorsed in national policy guidance, and now features widely in local authority policy across England, albeit that the exact extent of its utilisation in practice remains unknown. The earliest iterations focused on rough sleepers, but there is some evidence that the remit of reconnection is being expanded to single homeless people more generally in some places, that is, that it is being considered as a response for all single homeless people without a proven connection in the identifying local authority area regardless of whether they have slept rough.

There is significant variation in the approach and definitions employed at the local level, most notably as regards practices referred to as 'reconnection', 'relocation' and/or 'diversion'; so too distinctions between 'assisted' and 'supported' reconnections. All polices are however underpinned by essentially the same rationale, these being aspirations to: prioritise the needs of 'local' rough sleepers in the context of restricted resources; force other local authorities to take responsibility for 'their' rough sleepers; reduce the potential for rough sleepers to become involved in damaging street lifestyles; and improve potential outcomes for rough sleepers by supporting them to move to areas where they are likely to have access to informal social support and/or formal support services.

All the policies reviewed emphasise that reconnection should not be employed as a response for all rough sleepers, without exception stating that it is inappropriate in cases where individuals are known to be fleeing from domestic violence or are at proven risk of harm where they have an established connection. Furthermore

some, but not all, local policies state that exemptions should also apply if individual rough sleepers have very high support needs and/or have lived such transient lifestyles that they do not have a 'meaningful' connection to any local authority area.

Significantly, the review of policies has revealed evolution of what is deemed to constitute a 'connection'. In early Central Government guidance, this is defined only loosely (e.g. as having had stable accommodation or employment, claimed benefits, or accessed health, probation or social services in an area) and there are no prescriptions as regards how recent this must have been to qualify as a connection. At the local level, however, the term 'local connection', as used in statutory homelessness guidance, is employed. These definitional issues have had a profound influence on the ways in which reconnection is practiced 'on the ground', as will be described in detail in Chapter 4. Before that, however, the next chapter (Chapter 3) reviews the available data on the scale of reconnections and characteristics of the people targeted.

3. The scale of reconnections and profile of rough sleepers targeted

This chapter provides an overview of the scale of reconnection implementation, together with a profile of the rough sleepers affected, insofar as available data allows. No data regarding reconnections is collected at the national level, hence what follows draws upon on information collated within each of the four case study localities. The data kept were very limited in most of these areas; the exception being London, where reconnections of verified rough sleepers are recorded on the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) database. What follows therefore draws heavily upon CHAIN data, supplemented with the (limited) data available from the other locations. The chapter begins by outlining the findings of the CHAIN data analysis in London, before reviewing the data relating to the other three case study areas.

3.1 London

CHAIN offers the most comprehensive data source regarding the utilisation of reconnections, and characteristics of rough sleepers more generally, within the UK (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013). It should not be assumed that any patterns revealed will necessarily be replicated in other parts of the UK, however, given that the characteristics of the street homeless population can be quite different in other areas (Fitzpatrick et al., 2013). The data do nevertheless offer valuable insights into the scale and practice of reconnections within the capital.

Analysis of CHAIN data was conducted for the period 1 April 2011 until 31 December

2013. This provided records for a total of 3,827 rough sleepers who had been targeted for reconnection, that is, had information regarding a reconnection offer on their CHAIN record[6]. It must be noted that the data presented here relate to the whole of London, not just the case study borough under question[7]. Details regarding reconnections both within and outside the UK are included where relevant, so as to enable comparisons between the scale and nature of 'domestic' (within UK) and 'international' reconnections.

3.1.1 Number of reconnections

As Figure 3.1 indicates, the prevalence of reconnections from/within London has fluctuated over the study period, with the total number recorded ranging from 245 in the second quarter of 2011 (April-June 2011) and 396 in each of quarters three and four of 2012 (July-December 2012), tailing off slightly in the latter half of 2013. The number of reconnections to locations in other parts of the UK (that is, outside London) has not varied significantly (ranging between approximately 50 and 80 reconnections each quarter), whereas the numbers reconnected to other boroughs within the capital and overseas has fluctuated notably.

The proportion of (all) rough sleepers targeted for reconnection within the capital has not varied markedly over the time period under question. As Figure 3.2 shows, the percentage of all verified rough sleepers recorded on CHAIN whom were targeted for reconnection was 13% at both the beginning and end of the period under investigation, and peaked at 19% in the second quarter of

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6   Some of the base numbers referred to below may vary slightly from this figure, however, given that cases with missing destination data were necessarily excluded from geographic subgroup analysis.

7   The broader (London-wide) dataset is drawn upon in recognition of the operation of pan-London reconnection protocol (London Councils, 2006) and cross-boundary operation of the NSNO Hubs (60% of the 3,827 individuals reconnected had attended a NSNO Hub). Utilising the London-wide data also provides a larger sample thus enabling more detailed subgroup analysis.

Figure 3.1: Number of reconnections from/within London, April 2011 – December 2013, by destination
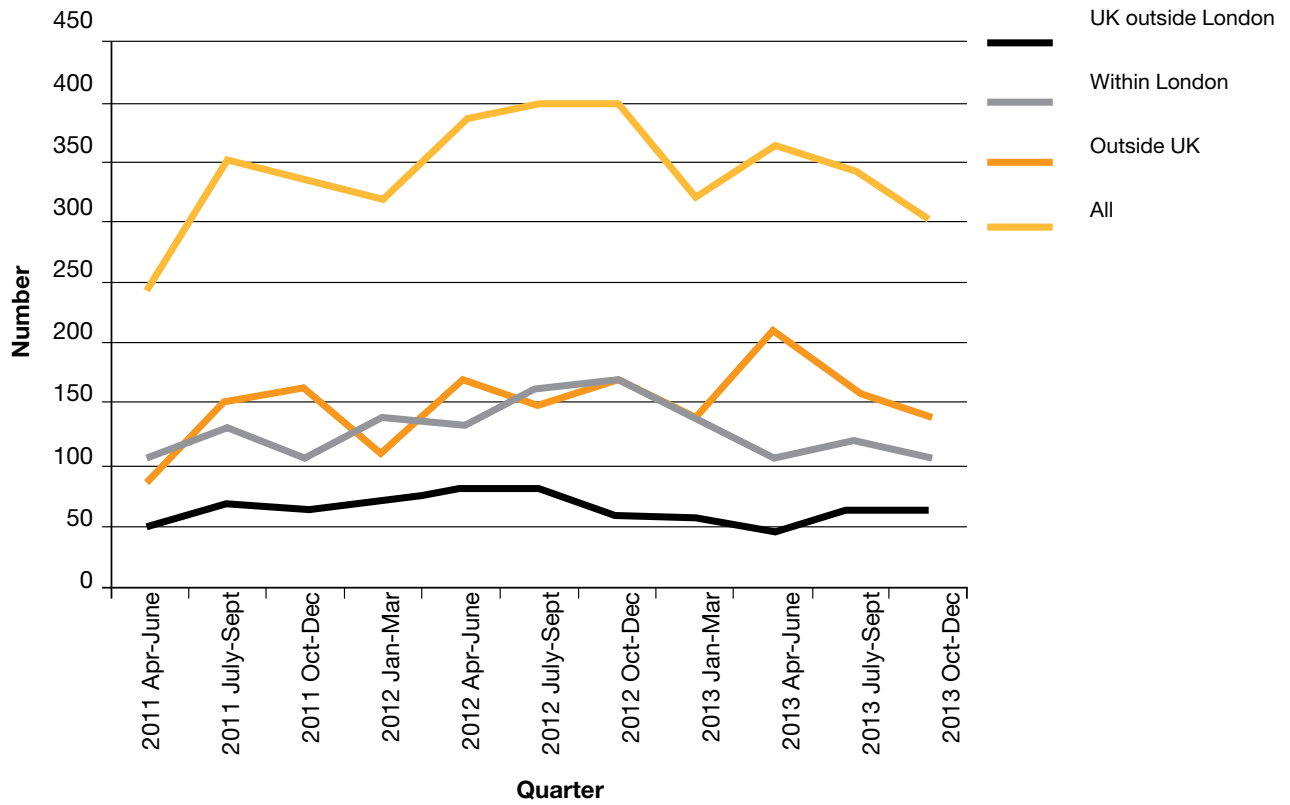
Source: CHAIN. Base: 3753 (701 UK outside London; 1406 within London; 1646 outside UK).

Figure 3.2: Proportion of all rough sleepers targeted for reconnection, London April 2011 – December 2013
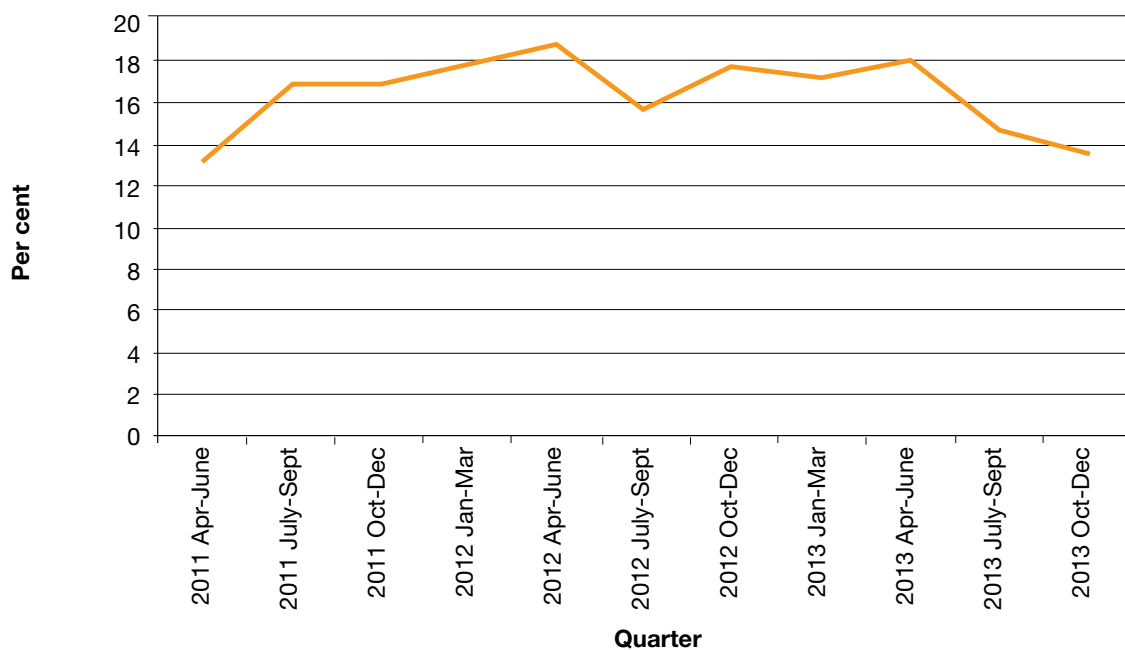
Source: CHAIN. Base: 3827 (reconnected rough sleepers).

Figure 3.3: Destinations of all reconnections from/within London
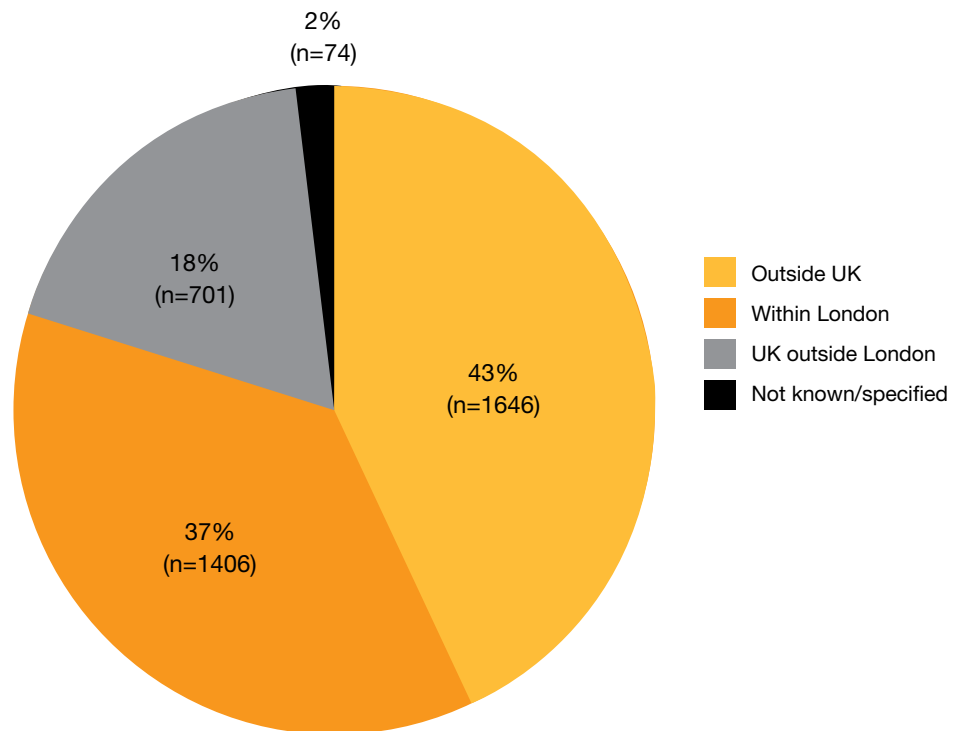
Source: CHAIN. Base: 3827.

2012 (mean 16%, median 17%).

3.1.2 Reconnection destinations

A key finding to note from the CHAIN analysis is that domestic inter-city reconnections (from London to another area outside the capital) comprise a relatively small proportion of all reconnections, with these being experienced by fewer than one in five (18% of) all rough sleepers targeted. As Figure 3.3 reveals, the greatest proportion of reconnections recorded were in fact international reconnections to destinations outside the UK (43%), followed by domestic intra-city reconnections to another London borough (37%).

Focusing on reconnections within the UK only, Table 3.1 reveals that the vast majority (94%) of these domestic reconnections (from or within London) were to another

region within England, and most commonly to another London borough (with intra-city reconnections accounting for 67% of all domestic reconnections). Only a very small minority were reconnected to a location in either Scotland (3%), Wales (2%), or Northern Ireland (less than 1%).

3.1.3 Characteristics of rough sleepers reconnected

The majority of rough sleepers targeted for reconnection were men (86%), reflecting the demographic composition of the capital's rough sleeping population as a whole (Broadway, 2013). As Figure 3.4 shows, more than three quarters (77%) fell within the 25-54 age bracket, but 14% were under the age of 25. The age profiles of people being reconnected did not vary significantly by destination area, albeit that those reconnected overseas were marginally

Table 3.1: Regional destinations of UK reconnections from/within London

Destination area	No.	Per cent
Scotland	72	3
Wales	34	2
Northern Ireland	9	<1
England *(comprising):*	1990	94
…London	(1406)	(67)
…North East	(26)	(1)
…North West	(111)	(5)
…Yorkshire and the Humber	(49)	(2)
…East Midlands	(60)	(3)
…West Midlands	(53)	(3)
…East of England	(63)	(3)
…South East	(172)	(8)
…South West	(50)	(2)
Not specified	2	<1
Total	2107	100

Source: CHAIN.

Figure 3.4: Age profile of rough sleepers reconnected from/within London, by destination
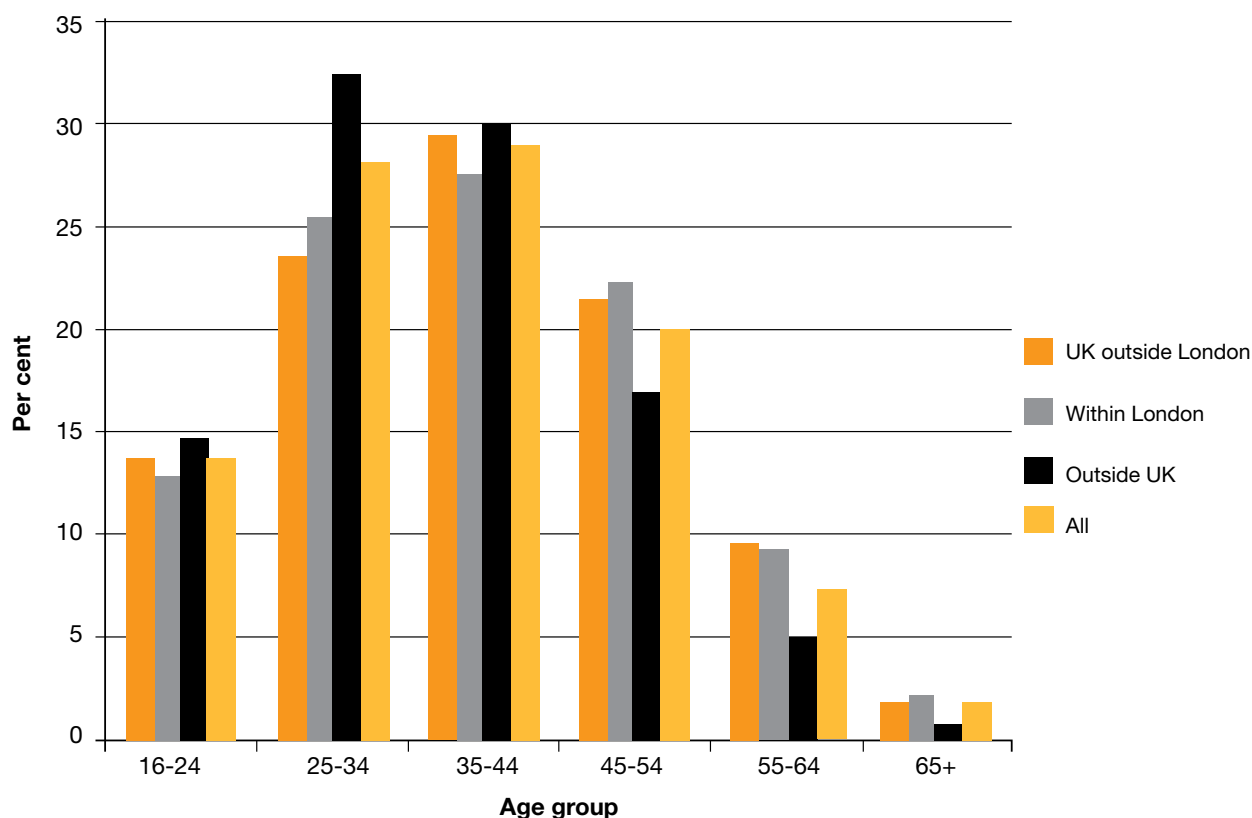
Source: CHAIN. Base: 3753 (701 UK outside London; 1406 within London; 1646 outside UK).

younger overall than those reconnected within London or elsewhere in the UK.

With regard to ethnicity, the great majority (90%) of rough sleepers reconnected to other cities within the UK were White, with only 10% being from ethnic minority backgrounds (Table 3.2). This profile differed from the ethnic composition of people reconnected within London, wherein Black/Black British rough sleepers were disproportionately represented; so too those reconnected abroad, where other ethnic groups (particularly those from Gypsy/Romany/Irish Traveller backgrounds) were disproportionally represented (Table 3.2).

The majority of those individuals targeted for domestic reconnections were UK nationals: this was true of 83% of those reconnected within the UK but outside the capital, and 67% of those reconnected within London.

CHAIN also records the number of times individuals have been witnessed sleeping rough by outreach workers, as well as the number of (calendar) quarters such incidences have been recorded in, thus giving some indication as to the duration (and/or number) of homelessness episodes experienced. As Table 3.3 indicates, most of the individuals targeted for reconnections were reported as being seen sleeping rough once only (60%) and/or during one quarter

only (69%). That said, this was less likely to be true of people reconnected to other parts of the UK than those reconnected within London or abroad. People reconnected to other parts of the UK (outside London) were also much more likely than these other groups to have been witnessed sleeping rough on 30 or more occasions (13%, as compared with 4% of each of the other groups) or within five or more quarters (24%, as compared with 7% and 9% of those reconnected within London and abroad respectively).

Figure 3.5 provides an overview of the prevalence of substance misuse and/or mental health problems amongst the rough sleepers reconnected, as recorded by street outreach workers. This indicates that almost half (48%) of those reconnected within the UK outside of London suffered from mental health problems, 44% alcohol problems, and 30% drug problems. The proportions reported to experience these problems were relatively similar to those of rough sleepers reconnected within London, but were markedly higher than individuals reconnected abroad.

Table 3.2: Ethnic background of rough sleepers reconnected from/within London, by destination

Ethnic origin	UK outside London (%)	Within London (%)	Outside UK (%)	All (%)
White: British, Irish or any other White background	90	56	80	73
Black or Black British	6	28	3	13
Asian or Asian British	2	10	3	5
Other ethnic groups	2	6	15	9
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: CHAIN. Base 3753 (701 UK outside London; 1406 within London; 1646 outside UK).

Table 3.3: Number of times and quarters seen rough sleeping, by destination

	UK outside London (%)	Within London (%)	Outside UK (%)	All (%)
No. times seen				
1	40	74	56	60
2-9	31	18	31	26
10-29	17	4	9	9
30-49	6	2	2	3
50+	7	3	2	3
Total	100	100	100	100
No. quarters seen				
1	50	79	69	69
2-4	27	14	22	20
5-9	16	3	7	7
10+	7	3	2	4
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: CHAIN. Base 3753 (701 UK outside London; 1406 within London; 1646 outside UK).

Figure 3.5: Support needs of rough sleepers reconnected from/within London, by destination
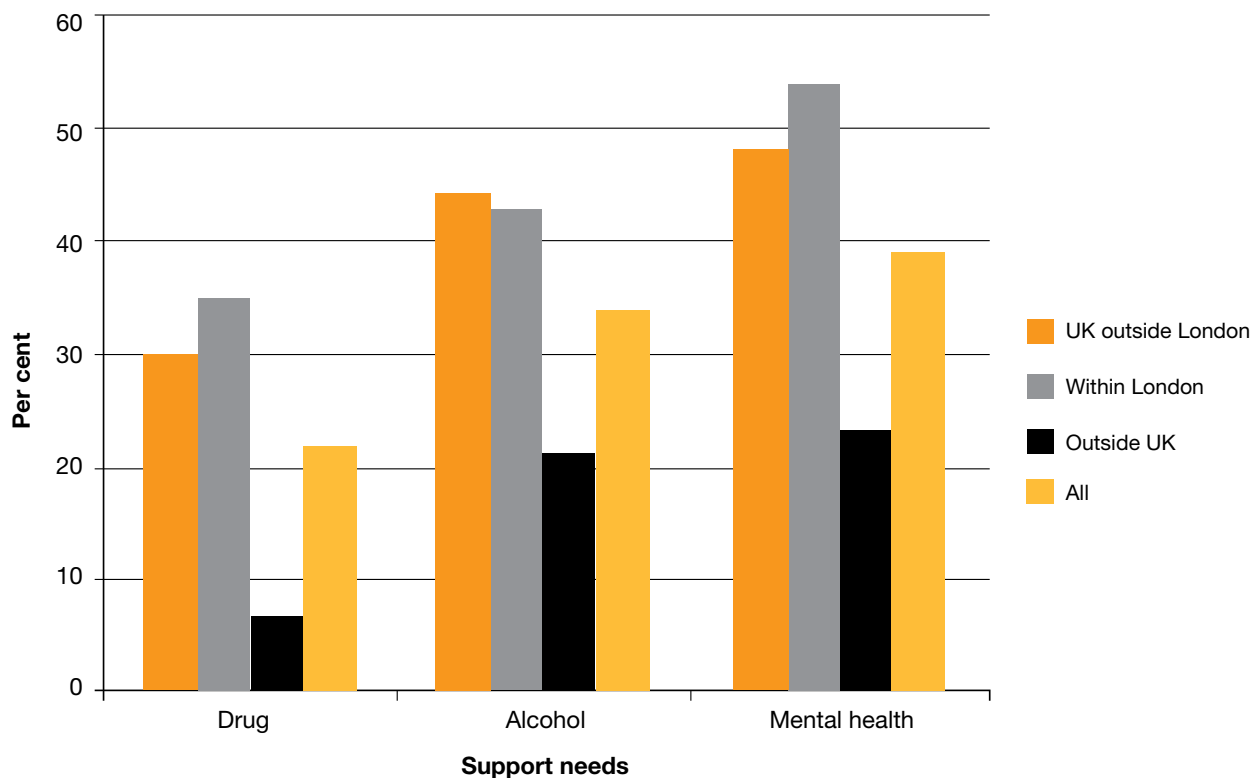
Source: CHAIN. Base 3753 (701 UK outside London; 1406 within London; 1646 outside UK). More than one response possible.

3.1.4 Reason for and process of reconnection

Figure 3.6 portrays the reason(s) recorded for reconnection by outreach workers, selected from one or more of the four options listed. This shows that the most common reason was 'return to home area', reported for 77% of all rough sleepers, with little variation between those reconnected within London, elsewhere in the UK, or overseas. 'Move to area with appropriate services' and 'move to area with friends/family' were each recorded as reasons for around two in five rough sleepers in total (42% and 40% respectively), albeit that the former was most likely to be true for people reconnected within London (63%), and the latter for those reconnected overseas (55%). Only a small minority of individuals reconnected within London (4%) or elsewhere in the UK (7%) were reported as doing so to 'seek work'; this was much more likely to be the case for those reconnected abroad (23%).

Figure 3.6: Reason for reconnection of rough sleepers from/within London, by destination

Source: CHAIN. Base 3753 (701 UK outside London; 1406 within London; 1646 outside UK). More than one response possible.

Table 3.4: Work carried out for reconnections from/within London, by destination

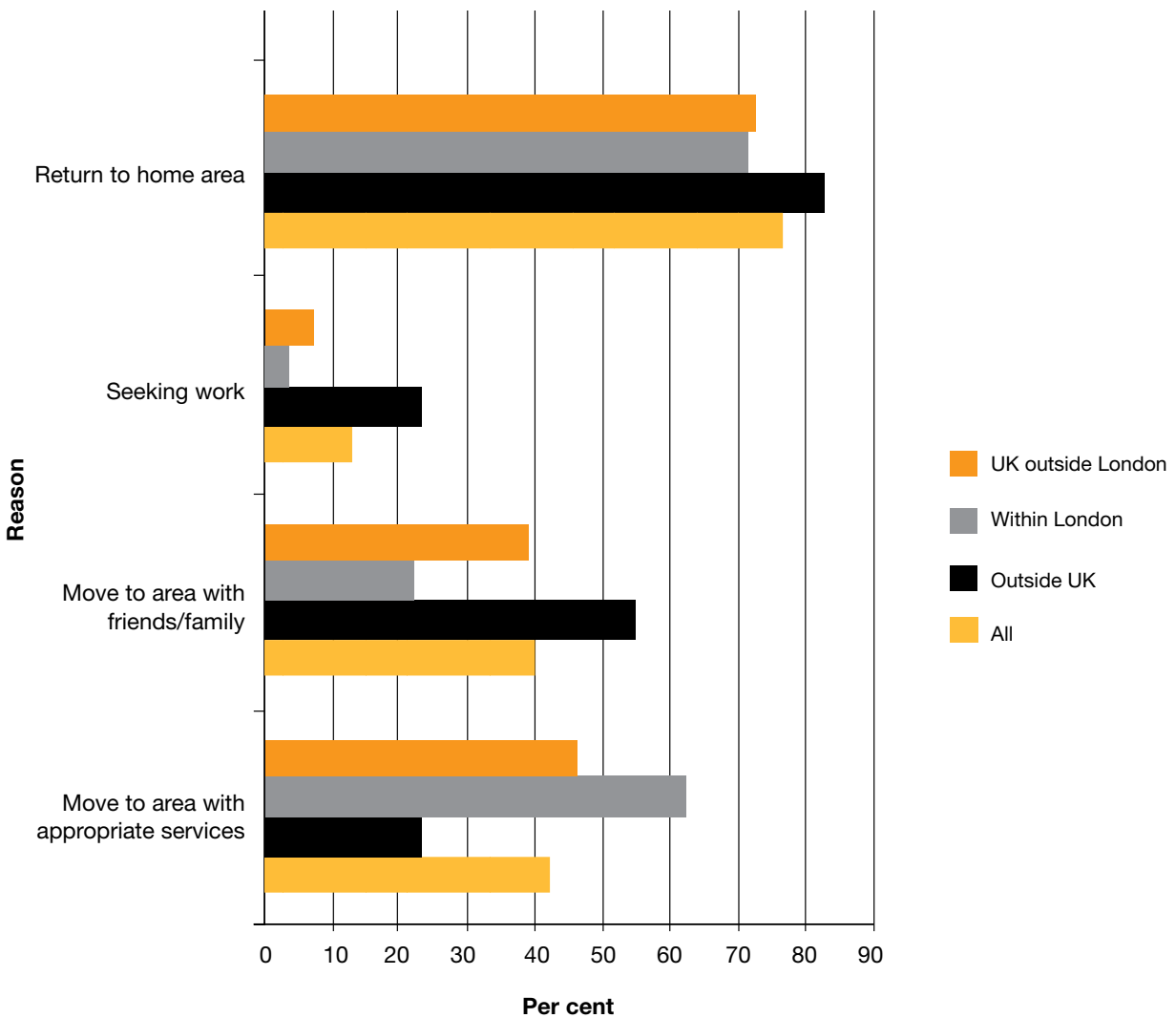|	UK outside London (%)	Within London (%)	Outside UK (%)	Total (%)
Fare/money provided	67	27	62	50
Advice provided	34	40	56	46
Liaison with services to assist reconnection	43	70	17	42
Escorted to coach station	4	0	34	16
Travel to location (accompanied by worker)	12	22	7	14
Liaison with agency in destination	10	27	4	14
Travel to location (independent)	5	12	9	9
Escorted to airport	0	0	14	6
Other	4	2	11	6
None - client's own decision	10	3	6	6
Total	100	100	100	100

Source: CHAIN. Base 3753 (701 UK outside London; 1406 within London; 1646 outside UK). More than one response possible.

Further to this, Table 3.4 provides an overview of the actions taken to support reconnections. This reveals that the cost of travel to the destination was covered in approximately two thirds (67%) of cases where individuals were reconnected to other parts of the UK (outside London), and that support workers accompanied the rough sleepers in 12% of such cases. Aside from assistance with travel costs, the provision of support to the majority of rough sleepers was very limited. Most notably, liaison with services to assist the reconnection and/or agencies in the destination locality were conducted for less than half of reconnections to other parts of the UK (43% and 10% respectively), less than was true for individuals reconnected within the capital (70% and 27% respectively), but significantly greater than for those reconnected abroad (17% and 4% respectively). In 10% of cases involving reconnections to other parts of the UK, none of the actions listed were recorded.

3.1.5 Reconnection outcomes

Data available on outcomes, as measured during follow-up at 24 hours, one week, one month and three months after reconnection, are summarised in Figure 3.7. The stark finding here is that very little information is collected on the outcomes for rough sleepers connected within the UK at any of these time points. Notably, no outcome information was recorded for 89% of those reconnected outside London 24 hours after the event, and this figure rose to 94% at three months. More positively, less than 1% of these rough sleepers were witnessed sleeping rough in London again at any of the time periods recorded. The equivalent figures for reconnections conducted within London were broadly similar.

Significantly more is recorded about outcomes for individuals reconnected outside the UK, in the short-term at least, with 41% of

Figure 3.7: Outcomes of reconnections from/within London, by destination and time
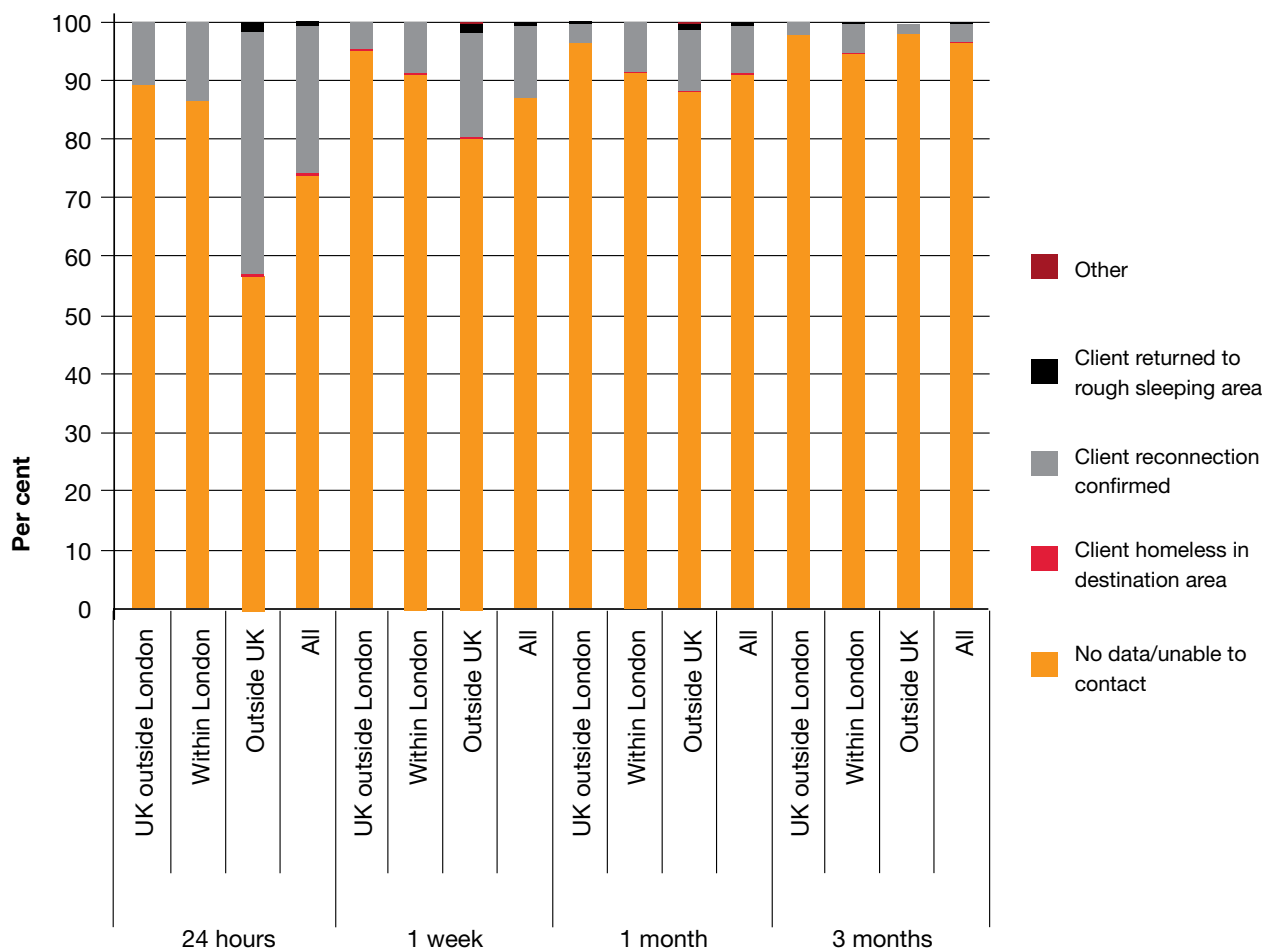
Source: CHAIN. Base 3753 (701 UK outside London; 1406 within London; 1646 outside UK).

reconnections of this group being 'confirmed' 24 hours after the event (as compared with 11% and 14% of those reconnected outside London and within London respectively). The proportion of confirmed did however tail off rapidly, dropping to 18% one week later, 10% one month after the event, and 2% after three months.

3.2   Other case study areas
As noted above, reconnections data is much more limited in the other case study areas, but that which is available is summarised below.

3.2.1 Eastern City
Eastern City's homelessness records do not differentiate between reconnections and diversions (see Chapter 2), but local key informant interviewees confirmed that diversions substantially outnumbered reconnections. The councils' records note that a total of 103 rough sleepers were targeted for either of these interventions

Table 3.5: Regional destinations of reconnections/diversions from Eastern City, April 2013-March 2014

Destination area	No.	Per cent
England (comprising):		
…London	9	13
…North East	4	6
…North West	0	0
…Yorkshire and the Humber	3	4
…East Midlands	5	7
…West Midlands	1	1
…East of England	29	41
…South East	9	13
…South West	8	11
Scotland	3	4
Total	71	100

Source: Eastern City data.

between the beginning of April 2013 and end of March 2014. Slightly more than two thirds (69%) of these individuals were diverted or reconnected to other parts of the UK, and the remaining 31% overseas (to central and eastern European nations in all but a few cases). Of those reconnected/diverted within the UK, nearly three quarters (73%) were reconnected/diverted to destinations within the same region or neighbouring regions (sharing a border) (see Table 3.5).

No data were available on the demographic or other characteristics of the rough sleepers targeted, or reconnection/diversion outcomes, for 2013/14. Data available for the August 2011 to November 2012 period, however, indicates that of the total 157 reconnection 'cases seen', 47 (30%) were 'diverted out of the city', contact was lost with 39 (25%), and 10 (6%) were

'successfully reconnected'[8]. Slightly more than one in ten of those diverted/reconnected were identified as 'returnees from diversion/reconnection'.

3.2.2 Seaside Town
In Seaside Town, data is recorded regarding the number of individuals assessed as homeless, eligible and in priority need but who do not have a local connection. Whilst only a minority of these individuals will have been sleeping rough at the time, or have necessarily had past experience of rough sleeping, all were regarded as potential reconnection cases hence their inclusion in the data below (see Chapter 2). The breakdown of these individuals by age and gender during the 2013 calendar year is portrayed in Figure 3.8. This reveals that slightly less than one third (31%) were aged 25 or younger, approximately the same

8   Other outcomes recorded for small numbers of cases include, amongst others: 'accepted into services' (4%), 'left city of own accord' (4%), 'self-diversion' (3%), 'found accommodation independently within city' (3%), 'into private rented accommodation' (3%), 'found accommodation independently outside city' (1%), and 'locally connected (evidence provided)' (1%).

Figure 3.8: Number of homeless people in Seaside Town without a local connection in 2013, by age and gender
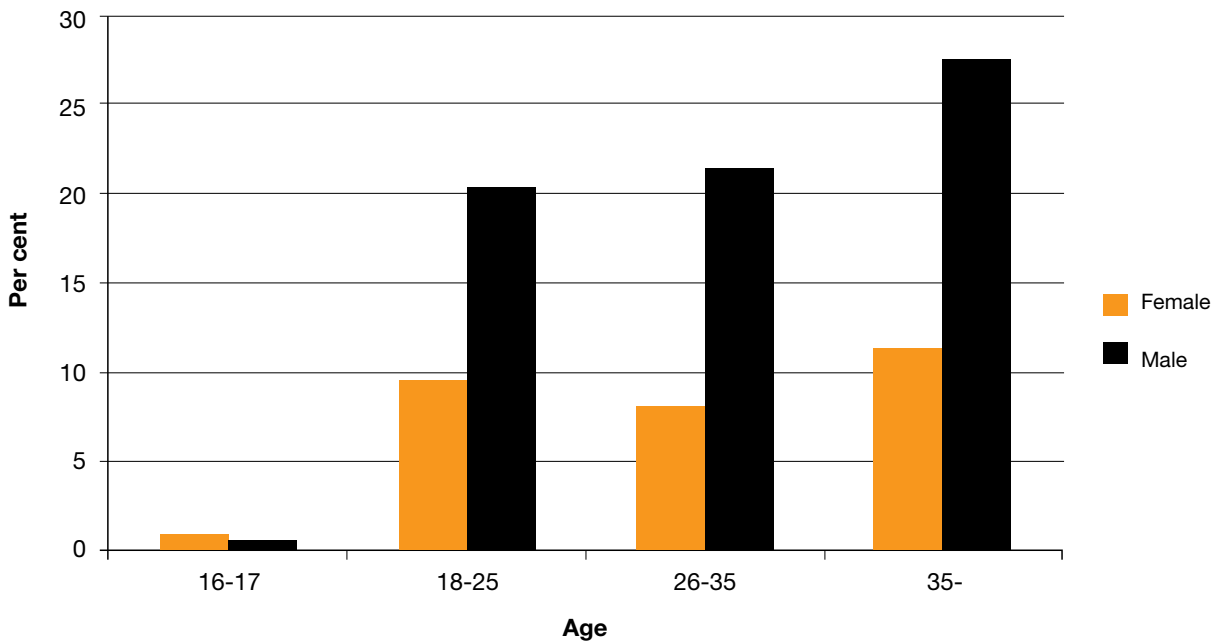
Source: Seaside Town local authority records.

proportion (29%) aged 26-35, and a slightly greater proportion (39%) were 35 or older.

3.2.3 Northern City
No data on the scale of reconnections or characteristics of rough sleepers affected were available in Northern City.

3.3   Conclusion

Data limitations notwithstanding, a key finding from the analysis of existing statistics is that domestic reconnections, that is, the reconnection of British nationals from one UK city/town to another, are less common than is perhaps generally supposed or implied in policy rhetoric. Certainly, London CHAIN data indicates that domestic reconnections from the capital are vastly outnumbered by international reconnections and reconnections from one London borough to another. In other places, reconnections to another UK town/city are more common than are international reconnections.

Furthermore, existing evidence indicates that the majority of inter-city domestic reconnections (outside London) involve rough sleepers returning to neighbouring local authorities or another within the same administrative region; reconnections involving greater distances are less common, and returns to other UK jurisdictions (i.e. Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland) are comparatively rare.

Very little information is available on the characteristics of rough sleepers affected by reconnection, but that which exists suggests that they broadly resemble the general rough sleeping population in demographic profile; so too that a significant minority have support needs associated with substance misuse and/or mental health problems.

Existing data indicates that the support provided to rough sleepers in the lead-up to and during domestic reconnection is, in the majority of cases, limited. Another striking finding is the absence of data on outcomes for rough sleepers: outcomes are recorded for only a very small minority of cases, if at all. Very little is thus known about the impacts of reconnection on rough sleepers' housing, health and other circumstances in either the short- or long-term.

4.   Reconnection practice and practitioner perspectives

This chapter describes the general approaches and specific measures employed to reconnect rough sleepers 'on the ground'. It draws predominantly upon interviews with both stakeholders and frontline practitioners in the four case study areas. The first section maps out the range of different approaches which are branded as forms of reconnection. This is followed by a detailed account of the way in which rough sleepers' connections are defined and assessed in practice, and then the actual tactics employed by frontline workers to encourage or support rough sleepers to be reconnected. The fourth section outlines the barriers practitioners face in implementing reconnection, while the fifth and final section discusses their views regarding the appropriateness or ethicality of reconnection as a response to rough sleeping.

4.1 Overview of approaches

The case study fieldwork revealed that in practice 'reconnection' is an umbrella term used to describe a range of approaches that aim to return or direct rough sleepers to places outside an identifying area. These may be classified into three main categories, including:

i)   *'Reconnection (proper)'*, that is, reconnection in the truest sense of the term, which involves supporting rough sleepers to return to a place where they have some established link – typically their most recent settled place of residence (see below) – as assessed and verified by a support worker. The level and nature of support provided varies but generally involves, at minimum, obtaining confirmation from the receiving local authority or voluntary sector agency that the individual will be eligible for accommodation and/or other support services. This process may (but does not always) involve negotiation with recipient authorities or agencies to secure an offer of support and, in some cases, accompanying the homeless person to the recipient area to oversee the handover of care.

ii)   *'Diversion'* (sometimes referred to as 'relocation'), essentially involves connecting (*cf. re*connecting) rough sleepers, that is, encouraging or supporting them to access services somewhere outwith the identifying area where they do not have an established connection. Targeted individuals are referred to voluntary sector service providers whom do not employ local connection eligibility criteria and therefore accept homeless people from outside the area (see below). Proponents justify the approach on grounds that it is better for those without a local connection to access accommodation in the recipient area, even if they have no connection there either, than to sleep rough where they are ineligible for services. Support workers usually (but not always) check that the receiving service(s) have capacity to accept the rough sleeper and provide travel funds, but do not accompany them on the journey.

iii)   *'Deflection'* is perhaps the most appropriate term to describe practices regarded to be a light touch form of 'advised reconnection' in some places. In such instances, 'new' rough sleepers who are not from the identifying area are informed (often by police officers) that they cannot access services in the area

and should (or must) return to their home area. No formal assessment of their support needs or connections elsewhere is made, nor is there any attempt to signpost or broker access to support services in the receiving area. Deflected rough sleepers may or may not be offered a ticket or travel warrant to fund their journey.

A number of interviewees commented that there is a significant lack of clarity, and widespread confusion, regarding what the term reconnection actually means, given its use in reference to all of the above strategies. That said, there is widespread agreement that deflection, which does not involve any assessment of the nature or strength of rough sleepers' connections elsewhere, nor any attempt to support them to return (beyond providing travel funds) cannot and should not justifiably be described as reconnection (see Chapter 2).

> *"There are some authorities who will give police travel warrants to issue out, so that they can just take someone to the station or coach station or whatever and put them on the train or the coach. That's not reconnection. That's cruel and heartless, and doesn't solve rough sleeping, because all they'll do is get off the bus somewhere else and rough sleep."*
> (National key informant)

On this account, it must be noted that deflection, and to a lesser extent diversion, deviate from the principles and practices endorsed in national reconnection guidance (see Chapter 2), albeit that the latter does at least involve active attempts to connect (*cf. re*connect) rough sleepers into support services (somewhere else). Only the first approach described above, 'reconnection (proper)' conforms to the key principles and

practices identified in national guidance, in that it actively attempts to link rough sleepers back to somewhere that they do in fact have an established connection (howsoever defined) (CLG, 2006; Homeless Link, 2014b). The following section described how such connections are defined and assessed in practice.

4.2 Defining and assessing connections

As noted above, attempts to investigate the location, nature and/or strength of a rough sleeper's connections outside an identifying authority's jurisdiction are rare in cases of diversion, and non-existent in instances of deflection. What follows, therefore, is an account of how connections are assessed in cases of reconnections which actively attempt to assess an individual's connections elsewhere.

4.2.1 Defining (local) connections
When asked how they defined a 'connection', stakeholders and frontline support workers typically referred rather generally to things such as a history of settled residence or sustained employment, presence of family, and/or somewhere where an individual has a history of using support services. In practice, however when assessing where a rough sleeper might have a connection for the purpose of reconnecting them, the definition employed is in virtually all instances restricted to elements of the 'local connection' criteria as described in Annex 18 of the *Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities* (CLG, 2006b)[9] (henceforth referred to simply as the *Code of Guidance*). This states that a homeless person might be considered to have a local connection if that individual "is, or in the past was, normally resident in the district" and suggests that

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9   Statutory homelessness legislation in England dictates that if a local authority has reason to believe that a household may be homeless or threat-ened with homelessness it has a duty to assess whether the household is owed the main homelessness duty. These enquiries explore, amongst other things, whether households are eligible for assistance, in priority need, and/or have a local connection to the area (Fitzpatrick et al., 2009).

"a working definition of 'normal residence' should be residence for at least 6 months in the area during the previous 12 months, or for not less than 3 years during the previous 5 year period" (CLG, 2006, p.231). The *Code of Guidance* also states that someone might be deemed to have a local connection if the individual "is at present employed in the district" (where that employment is not of a casual nature) and/or "has family associations in the district" (CLG, 2006b, p.231). Regarding the latter, the guidance specifies that "Family associations normally arise where an applicant … has parents, adult children or brothers or sisters who have been resident in the district for a period of at least 5 years … and the applicant indicates a wish to be near them" (CLG, 2006b, p.232).

Interviewees confirmed that whilst the *Code of Guidance* relates to statutory homelessness, and assessment of homeless persons' entitlement to settled housing in particular, local connection has increasingly been employed by local authorities to restrict single homeless persons' eligibility for services such as hostels and other building based services (e.g. day centres) since the Supporting People funding ring-fence was removed and its allocation devolved to the local level.   In each case study area local connection appeared to be used as a fairly 'blunt' tool to assess: firstly, whether an individual has a local connection to the identifying area and might therefore utilise Supporting People funded services; and (if not) to then identify another where they do have a local connection and attempt to reconnect them to that area.

Two significant points should be noted in this regard. First, there appeared to be a misconception on the part of many key stakeholders, and virtually all frontline workers facilitating within-UK reconnections, that local connection criteria constitute

a set of 'rules' to be rigidly applied in all cases[10]. In fact, even with respect to statutory homelessness assessments, these local connection criteria are mere *guidance* to which local authorities should 'have regard' in exercising their discretion under the legislation. Were a local authority to apply these local connection criteria as 'blanket' rules, as often appears now to be happening with respect to single homelessness services, they could in fact potentially leave themselves open to legal challenge.

Second, in regard to the statutory homelessness legislation, the only lawful use of the local connection criteria is to determine which local authority should take responsibility for securing longer-term accommodation for relevant households. The duty to accommodate will continue to rest with the local authority to whom the household applied until such time as this duty is successfully transferred to another local authority which accepts it (with arbitration arrangements made for the resolution of any disputes between local authorities). Local connection cannot therefore lawfully be used to exclude households from provision entirely, as appears now to be happening with respect to single homelessness services in some areas. For these and other reasons, questions could be asked as to the appropriateness of the current application of the *Code of Guidance* local connection criteria to single homelessness and rough sleeping services in the case study authorities.

4.2.2 Assessing (local) connections
In practice, the degree of emphasis placed on each element of local connection during reconnection assessments varied between the case study areas, with London Borough focussing attention almost entirely on the first, that is, in identifying where a rough sleeper's most recent place of normal

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10   This was not true of *international* reconnections, however, wherein connections are interpreted in a 'looser', less legalistic, fashion.

residence has been. This was justified on the grounds that potential recipient local authorities were otherwise resistant to offer services to reconnected rough sleepers who did not have a local connection to the area (see below).

> *"The intricacies of the local connection have been knocked off and we boil it down to have you lived here in the last six months? If not, that's it!"*
> (Local key informant, London Borough)

> *"Most hostels, even if they're direct access, want a local connection. Most places will require a local connection because they need Supporting People funding … so they're only allowed to work with people who have a local connection to that place. … Most have a general definition of six months in the last 12, or three years out of the last five."*
> (Frontline Worker, London Borough)

It should be noted that there is a lack of clarity regarding whether having slept rough in an area for six months is (or should be) deemed to constitute a local connection. In London Borough many frontline staff believed that it did, or at least that having been recorded as a verified rough sleeper on CHAIN for that long and/or using other homelessness services in the area for that time constituted a local connection. In some of the other case study areas, key informants emphasised that it did not and that the reconnection policies had recently been adapted to clarify this fact.

> *"We had a bout of people that were willing to rough sleep for six months in order to gain a local connection to [Eastern City], so we had to change the policy slightly to say that rough sleeping no longer counted as a local connection."*
> (Local key informant, Eastern City)

Notably, the weighting given to the presence of family in assessments of local connection varied considerably. In London Borough it had very little, if any, bearing. There, last place of normal residence (as defined above) was regarded as 'trumps'. This criterion was deemed to be the overriding priority in a context where local authorities are increasingly restricting even Supporting People funded services to those whom have a local connection as defined by the six out of 12 months or three out of five year 'hurdle'.

> *"Having lived somewhere as a child means nothing really ... If there was still family there we could look into that if we were running out of options, like if she'd not been somewhere for three out of the last six months or three of the past five years. But we'd never send someone back to somewhere where they might not be eligible for services. Because what if her sister or whoever booted her out? Then she's back homeless, back to square one."*
> (Frontline worker, London Borough)

> *"Specifically I'm looking for one [local authority area] wherever they will meet the legal criteria for local connection, so the six out of 12 months or the three out of five years. If they haven't got either of those then you ask them about any family connections … But, I think normally the local authorities normally refer you back to where you've been living … you can't really appeal and say, 'this is my local connection now because my kids are there', because they'll just say 'So why didn't you live there before?'"*
> (Frontline worker, London Borough)

In contrast, in the other three case study areas consideration of (immediate) family connections were accorded greater weighting, albeit that the nature of these connections – most notably the age and housing stability of family members – was carefully assessed so as to determine whether they would be an a position to offer sufficient support to the reconnected rough sleeper.

"It could be your brother that you haven't seen for 20 years but it will still give you a connection to the area."
(Local key informant, Eastern City)

"We would encourage them to return to their area that they have a support network, where they have family or friends who they can maybe return to and also we would look at trying to find them accommodation in that area prior to sending them back. That could be anything from family or friends if they're willing to accommodate, to a hostel, to a night shelter…"
(Local key informant, Seaside Town)

The process of obtaining evidence of local connections often involved checking for proof of residential address(es) and/or where targeted individuals had previously signed on for welfare benefits or received particular service interventions (e.g. methadone prescriptions). Information was normally obtained from public bodies (e.g. Department for Work and Pensions, Police, Local Authority housing offices etc.) but sometimes also informal sources such as letters from relatives or private landlords.

Importantly, rough sleepers' personal views on where they consider to be 'home' are given little if any weighting in assessments, unless that location coincides with their last settled place of residence, given the priority accorded to legalistic interpretations of local connection.

"Where people consider to be home doesn't play any factor … It doesn't seem fair to me, but that is the situation. People say, 'I was born here'. A lot of people think that if they were born in a certain area then that is their spiritual home and they don't see why you can't reconnect them there … I explain to them, it's to do with the Housing Act and local authority rules and who they'll accept and stuff."
(Frontline worker, London Borough)

Central Government representatives emphasise that this reduction of the concept of 'connection' to the legalistic definition of local connection as deployed in the *Code of Guidance*, and failure to take adequate cognisance of where rough sleepers consider to be 'home', represents a significant departure from the original intent of the national reconnection policy.

"You've actually got to try and work out where in terms of local that is the most effective returning place for that person … So, did local mean the last place you came from or did it mean where you grew up, where you had a tenancy, where you had a partner? … A surprising number of rough sleepers have children, and they have families … It's a question of unpicking where they come from and that is essentially what we mean by local. It shouldn't mean what it means in the homelessness legislation, whether you've worked here, or lived here for six months in the last year or whatever…"
(National key informant)

4.3 Techniques employed

Attempts to reconnect, divert or deflect rough sleepers typically involved emphasising the discomfort and dangers associated with street lifestyles and/or encouraging rough sleepers to consider the benefits of being 'home' closer to family and/or friends.

> *"Sometimes, it sounds awful, but scare tactics … I had one gentleman who was set about by two teenagers with skateboards who had his jaw and eye socket fractured, so I will tell them this and say this is not a one off incident, this can happen when you are rough sleeping … Also, if you talk about the weather in [Seaside Town], obviously people realise it is cold, but then when you add that the wind chill factor coming off the sea will drop it by four, five, six degrees … [Also] I explain that obviously they are going to have a lot more support there than they have here."*
> (Local key informant, Seaside Town)

> *"One of the conversations that you'd be having with somebody like that is that you know if they're saying they're trying to get away from bad influences, there are just as many bad influences here as there are in [name of city]. The other conversation you would be having with this person is about the reality of linking into services here …. Drug services in [London Borough] are not going to work with somebody unless they are likely eligible to be housed in [London Borough], so you know, they might easily be able to get their script transferred but they wouldn't get any additional support."*
> (Frontline worker, London Borough)

In addition, in all case study areas rough sleepers who refused to comply with a reconnection offer were refused access to local authority funded temporary accommodation (e.g. hostels) and/or other building based services (e.g. day centres). That said, the extent to which service providers in each area signed up to such protocols varied (see below and Chapter 6).

> *"If they refuse a single service offer [of reconnection] they can't access our service anymore and several other services within [London Borough] … That would be flagged onto the CHAIN database so it then wouldn't matter what service they went to in London most of them have got access to that database with the exception of a few sort of church based groups [and] wherever they went they would walk in the door and it's, 'Sorry mate, you need to go back to there'."*
> (Frontline worker, London Borough)

> *"[Name of service provider] are meant to make a single offer and if someone doesn't accept that offer then they need to be excluded … So our response would be 'Right, you've lost your place at [name of service] … Your options are even less now so this is our suggestion' … and then if they don't accept the offer that we're giving them, ultimately they are going to get woken up by the police every morning and moved."*
> (Local key informant, Eastern City)

As noted above, the extent to which *supportive* interventions are integrated in the reconnection process varies substantially. For (proper) reconnections, time (of varying amounts) is invested in assessing connections in destination area and brokering a positive response from recipient local authorities or service providers. This often involves liaising with housing or social work departments, and/or voluntary sector homelessness or other social care agencies (e.g. detox facilities) and can be a very time intensive process (see below). Some (but by no means all) support services will provide or negotiate access to temporary accommodation for the rough sleeper concerned for the duration of this process.

> *"We have to verify that they've got an address to go to. We have to ring and make sure they can stay there or we have to speak to the Housing Options team and*

things like that, so we always have to verify that there will be no rough sleeping."
(Local key informant, Northern City)

"We would make that first call, as we would explain that this fella has presented at our service … and we would be phoning that agency saying 'Can we have an appointment for this man to make into your service?' So we would be sending him back with an appointment somewhere, to someone … [And] he'd stay at the night centre until we had a plan of action and contacts and then travel will be provided, possibly food."
(Frontline worker, London Borough)

That said, a number of service providers commented that they were aware of situations wherein the support offered to individuals who had been reconnected consisted merely of advice that they contact the local authority in the area of local connection. The capacity of reconnecting agencies to devote resources, most notably time, to this supportive process varied considerably. It was often noted in London Borough, for example, that NSNO staff were in a position to offer more intensive support, including the potential for accompanying service users on their journey, than were those of mainstream outreach teams

A number of interviewees also commented that the provision of support for overseas reconnections frequently exceeded that for domestic reconnections, given the greater investment of resources in the former.

"Ironically, I think that for Polish rough sleepers or Bulgarian rough sleepers the reconnection process around those clients we do very well. Something about the fact they're going to another country, we buy them something to wear, we give them gifts to take to their family, we put them on a plane, we might take them to the airport, sometimes we'll go with them. We think about all of that. But there's something

about our practice [that] gets sloppier when it's UK reconnection."
(National key informant)

Stakeholders and frontline practitioners agreed unanimously that all individuals targeted for reconnections should ideally be followed up, that is, contacted after being reconnected, but noted that in practice this was very rare given resource and time restraints (see also Chapter 3)

"Unfortunately, because of the turnover of clients, it's out of sight out of mind. You know, this man is gone, we have done this part of the job. It's probably in about two per cent of the reconnections that we would check up, and it's purely, not that I don't want to check-up, but it's just time… As soon as one person leaves the next person's in and we're straight onto them."
(Frontline worker, London Borough)

"We have no idea what happens to loads … probably ten per cent keep returning … I'd like to say that the people we never come into contact with again … have succeeded and are stable. But the bottom line is we don't know … We're so busy crisis managing and firefighting there's no way we'd have time to [track people]."
(Local key informant, Eastern City)

4.4 Rough sleeper responsiveness

Practitioner interviewees reported that the process of reconnection is relatively 'straightforward' in some cases, wherein rough sleepers willingly comply. That said, there was a general consensus that straightforward reconnection cases were generally greatly outnumbered by those wherein rough sleeps were less willing to comply.

"There're some people who do agree to a supportive reconnection, or for us to facilitate them to return. If they've thrown a bit of a wobbly and ended up in London street homeless, and services are saying, 'Well, actually we can pay for you to get back. We can make some phone calls to people that can probably give you a bit of support' … A lot of people are very grateful for that … but that doesn't actually happen that often."
(Local key informant, London Borough)

"Some people get here and realise quite quickly that it's all bad, and want to go back very quickly. Some people have come here for a bit of help, really, so they've got people taken over their flat. You'd be confident that that would work out, if you've done enough work with their tenancy support workers. Got the problem resolved, sent them back home. That sort of stuff works."
(Frontline worker, London Borough)

More often, practitioners explained, a process likened to a 'game of chicken' or 'Mexican standoff' eventuates, wherein both parties hold their ground until one or other capitulates. Rough sleepers will at some point generally either agree to comply, 'disappear' (that is, are no longer witnessed sleeping rough in that place), or will 'dig their heels in' and remain in the area (see Chapter 5). If however a rough sleeper's health and wellbeing visibly deteriorates, service providers will almost always 'give in' and offer them access to local services.

"I used to always call it a game of chicken … you're cutting people off from services, you're watching them stay on the street … and you're playing a game of chicken, will they go and can you encourage them to go faster than you crack … So it's like a battle of wills … Then after a while you're not going to watch that person just get ill on the street, you're going to give in, put them in B&B or put them in the assessment centre. And then you'll have another go at persuading them to go, then they'll say no and then you put them in to your hostels and you accept them as one of your own…"
(National key informant)

"The reality is … when it becomes obvious he's not going back, we'll house him anyway. That's the reality and once it becomes clear that every feasible approach has been tried with this person, we've tried to get him to go back, they're still around a few months later, they'll be in a hostel or linked into drugs services and we'll take them on. That's the reality of it. But initially, every effort will be made to try and reconnect them."
(Frontline worker, London Borough)

This standoff can, in some cases, last for a number of months. In the interim, access to local authority funded services is generally (but not always) disallowed, such that the only services accessible to rough sleepers who refuse reconnection are the (often faith-based) 'non-interventionist' (Johnsen, 2014) night shelters or day centres which operate an open-door policy (see Chapter 5). A number of frontline support workers responsible for developing single service offers reported that they refer rough sleepers who refuse reconnection to these projects so that they may access basic accommodation and sustenance. Other services assist these cases to access accommodation in the private rented sector.

"If it's clear they're not going to go, or you want to give them time to think about the offer ... you'll refer to them [name of charity], so at least they can get basic shelter and food."
(Frontline worker, London Borough)

A number of practitioners commented that they often encounter less resistance from rough sleepers when employing diversion than reconnection, because whilst some rough sleepers refuse to return to the area they have come form on grounds of the need to avoid particular people, they may not object to 'giving another area a go' (see Chapter 5). That said, there was almost universal consensus that neither strategy was likely to be palatable to and/or 'work' with some individuals (see Chapter 6).

"Probably 99 per cent of the time, we don't reconnect people back to where they have a local connection; it's generally a waste of time half the time. So we try and divert them somewhere else that doesn't have a local connection policy, that they may be willing to give a go to ... A lot of people don't actually want to go back to where they came from in the first place, because if they did they'll still be there."
(Local key informant, Eastern City)

"We've got a chap at the moment who has just refused to leave [Northern City]. He's a big problem on the streets. A big problem with antisocial behaviour and he has a local connection elsewhere but we've just had to accept, actually, he is not going to return. He's been in [Northern City] now for so long he has become our problem and we need to help him."
(Local key informant, Northern City)

Stakeholders disagreed about the impact that reconnection had had on the prevalence of rough sleeping. A few noted that the approach had led to a reduction in levels of movement between local authority areas, and thereby believed that it must have at

least tempered, if not reduced, rough sleeper numbers. A greater number, however, reported that it was almost impossible to ascertain with any degree of confidence what the impact had been, given difficulty disentangling the influence of reconnection from other factors in a context where overall levels of rough sleeping were increasing.

"About eight/nine years ago, maybe even longer, it was a more transient thing. In [Northern City] we're starting to apply local connection to rough sleeper services. Previous to that we wouldn't have. Neither would [name of neighbouring city] neither would [name of neighbouring city] ... Local connection started biting everywhere and actually it did settle down the picture ... there are less people migrating into the city now than there was then."
(Key informant, Northern City)

"Has it had an affect [on rough sleeper numbers]? I don't know, it really is impossible to say. Numbers are going up again, and we're still doing it [reconnection] as much as if not more than ever, so... There are all sorts of other things going on. Welfare reform, EU migration, all that. It's really hard to separate out the effects of reconnection from all those other things."
(Local key informant, London Borough)

The following subsection provides greater detail regarding the challenges involved in reconnection, including but not limited to resistance from rough sleepers.

4.5 Barriers and challenges in implementation

In recounting the barriers to reconnection implementation, stakeholders and practitioners alike tended to highlight challenges associated with three main sources. First, they emphasised challenges associated with *recipient local authorities*, particularly councils' reticence to recognise and accept responsibility for rough sleepers who were deemed to have legitimate local connections to their area and/or failure to provide adequate services for homeless people. Outer London boroughs and less densely populated (especially rural and semi-rural) areas in other parts of the country were particular targets for criticism in the latter regard.

> *"If they [receiving LAs] don't have an obligation to accept [the main homelessness duty] on the whole they'll say no. We've had experience of people … with obvious connections to borough and they'll just say no, and no, and no, and no … They'll either just stall or they won't reply, or they'll just say they've been gone too long."*
> (Local key informant, London Borough)

> *"A lot of other local authorities, particularly [name of neighbouring local authority], will say, 'Well we have no homeless provision, so there's no point sending someone back to us because there aren't any hostels, there aren't any shelters'."*
> (Local key informant, Eastern City)

Interviewees also highlighted a second main barrier in implementation, this being that reconnection policies were undermined by *other service providers* who object to the approach in principle and/or are not signed up to associated protocol. Here, criticism was most stringently targeted at non-interventionist (and often faith-based) soup runs, night shelters and/or open-door day centres who continued to offer rough

sleepers support even if reconnection had been presented as a single service offer.

> *"[Name of agency] were, at the time, a thorn in the side really … because they'd be circumventing the local connection policy and we'd try to say to them, 'Look, you're not doing these people any favours. You're putting them in really poor B&B when actually they might have accommodation where they come from. They're likely to get thrown out at a moment's notice. When they come back to see us they still haven't got a local connection, but also they've got nowhere to go back to…'"*
> (Local key informant, Seaside Town)

> *"Some people … [have] a sense that reconnection is about washing your hands of a difficult group, and just making them someone else's problem … If a person is not going to get a service in a local authority because they don't otherwise have a connection there, I think you do them a disservice to try and sustain them there and it's like setting someone up to fail."*
> (Local key informant, London Borough)

Third, resistance on the part of *rough sleepers* was highlighted as a major challenge. This was often said to be borne of unrealistic expectations or misinformation, negative experiences of services in the recipient area, and/or fear that they will be at risk of harm if they return (see Chapter 5).

> *"Sometimes they're so damaged by their living on the street that they actually have impaired judgement in terms of what the best next step is or they're in denial. They really think that if they sleep a little longer on the street they really will find a job and they're just not realistic…"*
> (Local key informant, London Borough)

> *"Barriers from the client [are] often about fear: 'I've just run away,' or, 'I ran away some time ago, and now you're asking me*

to face up to all of this and go and sort it out: well, actually, if it was that easy I wouldn't have run away.'"
(National key informant)

On the latter of these issues, frontline workers emphasised that cases where rough sleepers claimed that they would be at risk of harm if they were to return were particularly problematic (see also below for a discussion of the associated ethical dilemmas). Whilst victims of domestic violence typically present with 'proof' of risk in the form of police incident numbers, individuals claiming to have fled from drug-related risks (e.g. debt owed to dealers) rarely did so given the tendency for such issues to go unreported.

"Some people don't trust the police or they … don't want to be seen as a grass, so regards to that, unless there is police involvement and the police are saying there's risk to life and limb, then we would probably say, 'To be honest we feel that you can return', which is difficult when you're on the front line and you've got someone crying…"
(Frontline worker, Seaside Town)

"[We often hear] 'There's people after me. I'm fleeing violence', and in order to accept that as a reason to stay in [Northern City] it has to be verified. The police have to give us confirmation that it's been reported that it is a serious threat to the person, but often … we find that people are running from drug debts. So they've a valid reason for not going back, but equally, they feel that they've got a valid reason for not going to the police about it."
(Local key informant, Northern City)

In a similar vein, frontline workers emphasised that obtaining sufficient detail regarding rough sleepers' connections could be very difficult: perhaps because they were loath to tell the 'full story' and/or were unable to recall or provide evidence of relevant details.

"Sometimes if people have been through the system, wherever they've been … they understand the local connection criteria and so will just say … 'I don't remember any of my addresses. I don't have any family. I'm not in touch with any family', in which case you can't verify a local connection to anywhere…"
(Local key informant, Northern City)

"People's situation changes and sometimes you get it wrong, to be honest, sometimes people will reveal more information… It can be hard to get the real story … That's why I have reservations about the whole single service offer thing."
(Local key informant, London Borough)

Further to this, a number of interviewees highlighted the potential for insisting that rough sleepers reconnect to damage the therapeutic relationship between support workers and rough sleepers and that this, in turn, could heighten rough sleepers' resistance to supportive interventions.

"Sometimes they'll refuse to go, or go and come back but with a chip on their shoulder … People are doubly resistant to whatever you try and do for them afterwards."
(Frontline worker, London Borough)

"Since we've increased the level of reconnections there is a level of hostility, for instance, from clients who are unable to use the service … the feeling that charities are just turning people away. That's had a negative effect on how clients see service provision and that can then act as a barrier…"
(Local key informant, London Borough)

Such impacts highlight a number of ethical issues which were raised by key informants and frontline practitioners alike. These are recounted below.

4.6 Views on appropriateness and ethicality

There was almost universal consensus that reconnection, with appropriate support, is an entirely appropriate service response when rough sleepers have made a 'bad decision' and arrived in the identifying area in an unplanned fashion without investigating the services available in their home area and/or have abandoned 'live' resources and services (e.g. temporary accommodation or substance misuse treatment) in that area. This stance was often justified on the grounds that homeless people should not have unrestricted choice regarding area of residence, as this does not reflect the experience of the general public at large.

"Reconnection is totally appropriate for him [name of rough sleeper], because he's spent all his life in [name of city]. He's not made particularly good choices considering his move to [name of city], and since coming here he's started using other substances, which is going to be detrimental to – well, it's not going to be doing him any favours … And all his networks are back home in [name of city]."
(Frontline worker, London Borough).

Stakeholders and staff did however almost always emphasise that such a response is only justifiable if careful assessment of connections and support needs is conducted and meaningful support provided.

"If you're looking someone in the eye and saying 'We're not going to offer you anything, you can just sleep on the street for as long as you want, here's that ticket to [name of city] we promised you', then that's unethical. I think if you do it properly with someone saying 'Look, these are your options, you're not from this area, we've no obligation legally to accommodate you, but we are willing to talk to this person or that person, you've indicated you lived there quite happily before and we can do x

or y or z to help you', I think that's all right."
(National key informant)

Some queried the extent to which a rough sleeper's needs and connections can be adequately assessed within the tight timeframes that frontline staff work to, especially when failure to comply renders a rough sleeper ineligible for services.

"If a thorough assessment has been done of somebody and you've concluded that that is their best offer, yes, they [single service offers] can be useful in terms of stopping the client just going round to different services and just getting more and more entrenched … But I don't trust that the assessments of people are always done thoroughly…"
(Local key informant, London Borough)

A number also questioned the ethicality of returning vulnerable people to areas offering inadequate support.

"I think there are those dilemmas in terms of, well, actually, if we send somebody back to a place where we think there's a poor service reputation, then is that ethical? I think that's a dilemma that's probably unresolved."
(National key informant)

Another significant ethical concern, frequently raised by frontline practitioners, related to concerns that rough sleepers might be sent back to areas where they are at genuine risk of harm, even if there is no evidence of this in the form of police records (see also Chapter 6).

"For me the only ethical dilemma comes when you meet people who say, 'I'm fleeing this, I'm fleeing that' … There are the ones that have caused it themselves, because … they've pissed off a drug dealer and that dealer is out to kill them … Well we're not going to facilitate a whole new life for you because you screwed up in that sense. But then obviously there

are the people who there is some genuine threat to their life … so there's a fine line between the two of them…"
(Local key informant, London Borough)

Many also questioned the ethicality of denying rough sleepers access to basic services when they refuse to be reconnected. In this vein, a number of interviewees reported that reconnection policies involving single service offers conflicted with their organisational ethos.

"I don't think we'd ever get to the point where we would refuse to provide services in line with the reconnections policy because that would not sit well with our ethos."
(Local key informant, Eastern City)

"I know it sounds awful, but there's some people have been given reconnection advice from here who end up then being out [sleeping rough] for months … On an ethical level, on a values level, that is clearly not acceptable ... When clients come to us and they're distressed, and they're angry … what they want is compassion and warmth … So that almost feels opposite when you say 'You've got to go back to blooming [name of city]' on day one, it's just counter-intuitive."
(Local key informant, London Borough)

Many frontline workers reported feeling decidedly uncomfortable about reconnection on a personal level given anxieties about the issues outlined above, but felt that they had 'no choice' but to do so given policy directives. Interestingly, some noted that they reconcile themselves to the practice in the knowledge that individuals who refuse reconnection can usually access basic services via night shelters or similar provision. Some actively refer such individuals to these services so as to ensure that their essential needs for shelter and food are met, in the short term at least. This practice is in some ways ironic given

that these non-interventionist agencies are frequently castigated by local authorities and other service providers for undermining reconnection polices (see Chapter 4).

"You could argue that it's quite a contentious issue denying people access to basic services for instance. But there are other services who don't necessarily follow that line that they can use. But I can't say it's without conflict for me … What would happen if there really were no other services that they could use if they refuse to go [be reconnected]?"
(Frontline worker, London Borough)

"I suppose you can't let yourself have concerns about it because you have no choice … You have no choice in the matter. It is what it is and so to get overly involved in that sort of thinking behind it is very difficult … It's very difficult and we try not to get pulled in."
(Local key informant, Northern City)

4.7 Conclusion

In examining the practice of reconnections, this chapter has shown that the term is used to describe a range of approaches which fall into three broad categories: reconnection (proper), diversion and deflection. Only the first of these approaches adheres to the principles and practices endorsed in national guidance, that is, supports rough sleepers to access services somewhere they have a legitimate connection. In contrast, diversions *connect*, as opposed to *re*connect individuals, that is, attempt to link them into services in another area where they have no connection. Deflections make no attempt to assess or support rough sleepers to return, other than to (perhaps) provide them with a travel ticket or warrant.

In practice, connections are almost always defined in terms of local connection criteria outlined in the *Code of Guidance* (CLG, 2006). This is used as a 'blunt' tool, largely employed in a blanket fashion, to assess whether a rough sleeper has a local connection to the identifying area and, if not, to identify another where they do and attempt to reconnect them there. In some local authority areas, the last place of settled residence, this being where an individual has lived for six out of the last twelve months or three out of the last five years, is regarded as 'trumps' and other criteria are rarely taken into consideration; in others, weighting is given to other forms of local connection, such as having (adult) family members living in the area. Important questions must be raised regarding the appropriateness of the current application of the *Code of Guidance* local connection criteria to single homelessness and rough sleeping services.

The process of reconnection typically involves emphasising the discomfort and dangers associated with rough sleeping and/or potential benefits of returning to the recipient area; so too the denial of services for failure to comply. The balance between these varies, as does the intensity of support provided, which ranges from intensive assessment of needs and brokering of support in the recipient area at one extreme, to virtually nothing (aside from the provision of a travel warrant) at the other.

Stakeholders frequently liken reconnection to a 'game of chicken' or a 'Mexican standoff' between reconnectors and potential reconnectees, wherein both parties hold their ground until one or other capitulates. Importantly, service providers will always 'give in' and provide services if a rough sleeper refuses to be reconnected and their wellbeing visibly deteriorates whilst they remain on the streets. Rough sleepers with complex support needs are usually (but not always) exempted from reconnection policies. Resource constrains dictate that only a minority of reconnected individuals are 'checked up on' after the move.

Stakeholders identify a number of barriers to reconnection, including: reticence or inability on the part of recipient local authorities to provide services for reconnected rough sleepers; the actions of non-interventionist support agencies which are said to undermine reconnection policies; and resistance on the part of rough sleepers. Resource constraints dictate that only a small minority of rough sleepers are contacted by reconnecting agencies after the move; practitioners' awareness of reconnection outcomes is thus extremely limited.

There is widespread agreement that reconnection is wholly appropriate in some circumstances, most notably where rough sleepers have made an unplanned move to an identifying area and abandoned 'live' connections or services in that area. Stakeholders did however highlight a number of significant ethical issues, including amongst others: concerns about the adequacy of needs assessments and levels of support provided in identifying areas; insufficient service responses in some recipient areas; the potential risk of harm to some rough sleepers if they return; and questions regarding the ethicality of denying people who refuse to be reconnected access to accommodation and other basic services.

5. Reconnection outcomes and rough sleeper perspectives

This chapter focuses on the experiences and outcomes of reconnection from the perspective of rough sleepers. It draws primarily upon the interviews with rough sleepers conducted before and/or after their experiences of reconnection. It begins by reviewing rough sleepers' reasons for moving to the areas in which they had been targeted for reconnection, before then describing their experiences of the assessment process and move. This is followed by an overview of the range of responses and outcomes reported by rough sleepers, together with their views on the appropriateness of the intervention. Boxes outlining the experiences of illustrative case examples are distributed throughout the chapter.

5.1 Reasons for moving

The proportion of all rough sleepers that move from one place to another within the UK remains unknown, hence the extent of domestic migration amongst the street homeless population will remain a moot question until research examining that very issue is conducted. That caveat notwithstanding, interview data suggest that the reasons underpinning rough sleepers' moves to identifying areas, that is, the place where they are targeted for reconnection, might broadly be classified as either 'push' or 'pull' factors. Most rough sleeper interviewees identified both in explaining why they had moved, albeit that the weighting accorded to each varied for individual cases.

5.1.1 Push factors

Push factors are typically articulated in terms of rough sleepers wanting or needing to get away (or 'run away') from something, the common denominator underpinning which is

broken relationship(s), be that with a partner, family member, and/or peer networks. In the latter case, push factors are often attributed to drug debts, gang affiliations and/or fears regarding perceived or actual risk of harm in the recipient area.

"There is absolutely no way I would go back to [name of town]. Let's just say that the split from my wife was not very amicable … I simply could not be in the same place."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 50s, London Borough)

"A lot of my friends used to take a lot of drugs and stuff and I was just sick of it. So that was one of other reasons why I went to [name of city] … I'd had enough of, they were always, you know, at my flat. So I just decided the only way I can get away from it is to go to [name of city] and start again."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 30s, London Borough)

"I'm gang affiliated and just due to family problems, I decided not to go home. So when I was released from jail into a bail hostel in [name of area] I started my travels really … People don't forget … so you would be putting me at risk by sending me back to [name of city] because within a year I'll be back in prison … or in a box [dead] because I used to argue, fight … I've been stabbed four times, all sorts of madness…"
(Rough sleeper, male, in 20s, Eastern City)

5.1.2 Pull factors

Interviews with rough sleepers and support providers indicate that there are six main pull factors influencing homes peoples' moves

to the area in which they were targeted for reconnection,[11] the first five of which are prevalent in moves to larger cities (such as Eastern City, Northern Town and London Borough), the sixth to moves to smaller centres such as Seaside Town.

First, larger cities are often perceived as offering relative *safety* on grounds of the greater prevalence of rough sleeping; so too the presence of police and outreach workers which are assumed to reduce the risk of potential harm from members of the street population or general public.

> *"It's well policed so it's a safe place to be homeless … if you're going to rough sleep anywhere it's probably the safest place to rough sleep."*
> (Local key informant, London Borough)

> *"[They go] where they feel it's safer to be and, of course, it's going to be Central London and it's going to be where the lights are on all the time and where there is action and activity."*
> (Local key informant, London Borough)

Second, it is often assumed that large cities will offer *anonymity*, thus reducing the potential for stigma and generating opportunities for a 'fresh start'.

> *I"f you decided to go and sleep rough in [name of city] then I think you would feel very much ostracised and you would be obvious as a rough sleeper and you walk into McDonalds and you would be a rough sleeper, and yet whereas here you can pretty much disappear."*
> (Local key informant, London Borough)

> *"Sometimes people are running away from debt, from the police, from people out to get them, you know all those sorts*

of things. And, of course, if you come to a place like London it's much easier to get lost and not to be found."
(Local key informant, London Borough)

Third, perceptions regarding the potential *camaraderie* within the street population are sometimes identified as a pull factor.

> *"[They think] 'There's a group of people that I'm going to feel part of. That's not the same if I live in [name of town], where I'm sleeping on a park bench and I'm the only person in the entire town that is, and I'm the outcast'."*
> (National key informant)

Fourth, larger urban centres were widely viewed as offering *opportunity* in relation to income generation (e.g. employment or begging opportunities) and/or the accessibility of illicit substances.

> *The problem is the streets are paved with gold in London … There's lots of stuff here, there's lots of jobs, there is lots of money. There's lots of begging opportunities. There are good drugs."*
> (Local key informant, London Borough)

> *"They will gravitate towards [Seaside Town] because they know that if they want to go out begging in the summer that people can make £300 a day. Maybe not so much now in the recession, but previous years…"*
> (Local key informant, Seaside Town)

Fifth, the perceived availability of *services*, especially emergency accommodation and/or free food provision, was commonly identified as a significant attraction.

> *"I knew I was going to be homeless, you know what I mean, but I mean obviously up north, where I'm from … there is no*

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11   Some but not all of these reasons are also reported in analysis of PrOMPT (Prevention Mapping and Planning Toolkit) data collected in London, which is a Homeless Link toolkit enabling local authorities to build a profile of rough sleepers in their area (see for example South East London Housing Partnership, 2011; also Homeless Link, 2010).

real like help with homeless, if you know what I mean? … Whereas [name of city's] massive for it … if I was going to survive that was where I was going to survive."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 30s, London Borough)

"You can survive in London rough sleeping because very kind people come out and give you soup and food. There are winter night shelters and all sorts of things, so … that's a factor as well."
(Local key informant, London Borough)

Sixth, and generally highlighted with reference to smaller centres rather than larger metropolitan cities, were *fond associations*, particularly memories of it as a 'nice place to be', some of which date back to childhood.

"[They say] 'I came here when I was younger, I had the best of times when I was here, my granddad used to bring me here'..."
(Local key informant, Seaside Town)

5.2 Experiences of assessment and reconnection move

In this section a distinction is made between the experiences of rough sleepers affected by: firstly, intra-city reconnections, wherein rough sleepers were reconnected from one London borough to another; and secondly, inter-city reconnections wherein rough sleepers were reconnected (or diverted) from one town/city to another somewhere else in the UK.

5.2.1 Intra-city reconnections (within London)

It should be noted from the outset that almost all the individuals targeted for intra-city reconnection, that is, those who were identified sleeping rough in London Borough and reconnected to another borough within Greater London, did not consider the intervention to constitute 'reconnection' *per se.* Rather, they tended to view the intervention as a form of personalised advocacy enabling them to negotiate access to accommodation and other services within their 'home' borough.

"They say I'm being reconnected, right, but I don't really see it like that. Not like the other people in here who are being sent somewhere else. Like, as I see it, [name of council] just told me to go away before, but [name of agency] fought to get me what I should've been given in the first place."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 30s, London Borough)

In a minority of such cases, rough sleepers reported that they had been 'sent' to London Borough or neighbouring inner-city boroughs to access homelessness services, particularly emergency accommodation and free food, after having being told by local authority officers that there were no such services in the recipient ('home') area and/or that they were not entitled to access them.

Box 1: Jane – reconnected from one London borough to another

Jane is 47. She grew up in an outer London Borough and has spent much of her adult life living there. Her mother and a sister also live locally. Jane lost her job a few months ago after 'stupidly drinking a bit too much on a few too many occasions' and recently lost her private rented flat as a result of rent arrears. She initially stayed with her sister but could not do that for long because she had to sleep on the sofa and did not want to impose on her sister's goodwill. She approached her local authority for help, but explains that she was 'told to go to central London because that's where all the homelessness services are'.

Not knowing what to do ('I didn't have a frigging clue'), Jane slept rough for a night in the city centre. She was found by street outreach workers and taken to a NSNO Hub for assessment. The reconnection worker there quickly ascertained that she had a local connection to her home borough, helped her gather together evidence of this, and accompanied her to an appointment at the council housing department there. Jane explains that the conversation between the local authority officer and her reconnection worker was 'quite heated at times' but that she was, in the end, offered temporary accommodation.

Jane is now on a waiting list for a housing association flat. After 'unrelenting' encouragement from her sister, she is also considering attending a community rehabilitation programme which she thinks might help given that her drinking 'has been getting a bit out of hand'. Jane is very grateful for the support provided by her reconnection worker, and notes that 'I honestly don't know what would have happened to me if she had not been with me, fighting my case, that day – I expect that they would have just sent me away again'.

"I only came to central London because [name of council] couldn't help me and told me this is where the homelessness services are."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 30s, London Borough)

Rough sleepers targeted for intra-city reconnection typically reported finding the process of assessment stressful, but were in almost all instances grateful for the support offered, especially when reconnection workers accompanied them to meetings in their home borough and proactively advocated on their behalf to ensure they could access the services to which they should have been entitled in the first place (see for example Box 1).

"I was really glad she [reconnections worker] went with me [to the council in recipient area]. She had a right argument with the people there to get me what I needed. I would have just been fobbed off again, no doubt, like … if she hadn't been with me."
(Rough sleeper, female, in 40s, London Borough)

With few exceptions, intra-city reconnectees were receptive to the support provided during assessment and reconnection, and much less likely to refuse to comply with a reconnection single service offer than was the case for those experiencing inter-city reconnections (see below and Section 5.3). That said, several reported feeling 'in limbo' whilst remaining in emergency accommodation during lengthy negotiations between identifying and recipient authorities.

5.2.2 Inter-city reconnections (from one town/city to another)
Virtually all of the rough sleepers who were targeted for an inter-city reconnection reported that being told that they were not entitled to services in the identifying area and would need to be reconnected was confusing, stressful, and/or upsetting. Many described being particularly confused about councils' interpretation and application of local connection criteria, especially the definitions of 'work' and, more commonly, 'family' connections; so too the lack of clarity regarding the time taken to establish (or, perhaps more significantly, 'lose') a local connection.

"They say to me 'Oh get a job and do this' I said, 'Okay then, I've worked for the Big Issue since January, I've got all my receipts from me books, now that gives me a good nine moths doesn't it?' … And they said 'No, it's not classed as a good enough job'."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 20s, Eastern City)

"My argument is that my daughter lives in [Seaside Town] and I'm getting access to her … I got told If I had my daughter in [Seaside Town] that's a connection, but I've come back out of jail and they're saying that's not a connection … I think it's your mum, your dad, your brothers, your sisters … over 18, which is stupid."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 20s, Seaside Town)

"I said 'Well okay then, I've just come from [name of city] … if you can put me in a different part of [that city] I'll go back to be accommodated, you know, if that's where you're saying my local connection is'. But then they [reconnections workers] got in touch with the council there and they're saying 'No we're not going to give his local connection to him' because I'd been in [Eastern City] now for over six months, so I've lost my connection there."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 20s, Eastern City)

They were particularly baffled, and often angered, by the primacy accorded to last place of settled residence, especially where they considered their family connections in the identifying area to offer greater social capital and/or a sense of belonging than residential history in the recipient area.

"My other brother has lived in the borough for the last 20 years. Like, for them to tell me I didn't have a local connection, to go back to [name of a northern city]… That hurts me, big style ... I'm a proper [name of a London region] boy who's got a proper [name of London region] accent … I was in [name of a northern city] for three years and … they just [said], 'We can't help you

because your local connection is [name of a northern city]. We're sorry'. I'm thinking, 'No local connection? No disrespect to you or any of your work colleagues, I'm more [of a] Londoner than anyone here', do you know what I mean?"
(Rough sleeper, male, in 40s, London Borough)

"My two [adult] daughters were in London, and I couldn't understand why that wasn't a connection. More of a connection than sending me back to [name of city] where I didn't want to be … My addresses have been there, but to me my connections were in London … My daughters are here and my doctor's here. I'm signed on here ... My home is where my daughters are … Do you know what I mean? I really got down about it."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 50s, London Borough)

Levels of anger and anxiety were particularly acute when affected individuals believed they would be at risk of harm should they return to the recipient area but were unable to provide evidence of threat in the form of police records (see Chapter 4). These individuals were the least likely to engage with her reconnection process.

"They want evidence, like police reports of people threatening to stab me and I said, 'Well I'm not going to grass people up, that's why I'm the way I am now, so I'm not going to do It' … I wouldn't mind living in [name of city], but I can't, so…"
(Rough sleeper, male, in 20s, Seaside Town)

"I had a gun pulled to my head. I wouldn't go to the police … I've been in trouble with the law myself. But I wouldn't go to the police for the simple fact is the guy could have got at my family; he would have got people to get my family … I explained all this to them [reconnection workers] and they said, 'Until we have proof from the police'... I'm not going to go to the

police…"
(Rough sleeper, male, in 40s, London Borough)

A number had been targeted for diversion rather than reconnection, that is, had been supported to move to a town or city where they had no connections but were able to access temporary accommodation (see Chapter 4). All such individuals questioned the logic underpinning such a response given their lack of connections to the recipient area.

> *"I don't understand why they sent me to [name of region]. If I don't have a connection, why'd they send me over here, anyway? ... They said I have to be here for three years [to establish a local connection]."*
> (Rough sleeper, male, in 20s, Eastern City)

> *"This is a lovely place. But it wasn't my choice. I didn't have a choice, really. This was the only place that said they'd accept me. So, this is where I came … I've never lived here, never at all. And I've no family here whatsoever … My links are in [name of region in south of England]."*
> (Rough sleeper, male, in 30s, London Borough)

The extent and nature of support offered before and during the process of reconnection (or diversion) varied widely. Some individuals felt very well supported during the assessment process and move, especially where they were accompanied by a reconnections worker. Others, however, had been offered little in the way of support at any point during the process, aside from being given the contact details of an agency to report to in the recipient area. Most, but not all, had been provided with a travel ticket or warrant. Only a small minority received a follow-up phone call after the event.

> *"They were brilliant with me. I mean the guy that come with me bought me food on the way up here, drinks … shampoos*

and all stuff like that. So yes they did help me, they helped me a lot ... He took me to the shelter, filled out forms, spoke to the woman that was doing the exchange, all them things."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 30s, London Borough)

> *"Out of ten, I would put it [the support provided] at about a four ... So, I got a little bit, but not much. … I think it would have been nice of them to check up on me."*
> (Rough sleeper, male, in teens, London Borough)

> *"That was the first time I heard from them was two and a half months later ... If I had stayed [in the recipient area] I would have been walking the streets during the day and sleeping in a shit-hole at night for two and a half months … I had to sort myself out."*
> (Rough sleeper, male, in 30s, London Borough)

The next section outlines the various ways in which rough sleeper interviewees had responded to the reconnection process. It focusses on the experiences of those who had been targeted for a move from one town/city to another, that is, it does not make reference to those experiencing the intra-city reconnections described above given that virtually all the rough sleepers moving within London, typically with the support of NSNO, did not consider the intervention to represent reconnection *per se* (see Section 5.2.1 above).

5.3 Response and outcome trajectories

The responses of rough sleepers targeted for reconnection can be classified into four broad categories, each of which is described below. The number of interviewees experiencing each was approximately equal, but this should be considered as indicative rather than representative of the range and relative prevalence of responses that may potentially occur.

i) Complied with reconnection offer, moved to and remained in recipient area

A number of rough sleeper interviewees elected to comply with the reconnections offer, albeit often with reservations, and returned to the recipient area (see for example Box 2). Their experiences once there were mixed. Some were (re)integrated into local services relatively quickly and generally reported that

their quality of life improved as compared to how it was when they were sleeping rough in the identifying area.

> *"Yeah, I guess life is better now. Certainly better than it was when I was skippering in London. I have moved a couple of times since I got here and my accommodation has progressively improved … I wouldn't say I am happy … I still don't have any friends of family here, but I feel fairly settled."*
> (Rough sleeper, male, in 50s, London Borough)

A few did however spend a period sleeping rough in the recipient area because they were reluctant to utilise the (often basic night shelter) accommodation they had been referred to in the first instance.

> *"Basically, they said like, there's like an*

Box 2: James – reconnected and remained in recipient area

Now aged 19, James first became homeless after being kicked out by his parents when he was 16, and has been supported by social work and/or homelessness agencies ever since. He suffers from a mental health problem that makes him prone to violent outbursts. James moved to London from a town on the south coast of England after he had 'got into a bit of trouble' with the law and was evicted from his homeless hostel as a consequences of one such outburst. A relative in London had offered to let him stay in her flat while he 'sorted himself out', but subsequently asked him to leave when it became inconvenient having him stay.

He slept rough for a few nights before being assessed by reconnection workers and told he would need to return to his home town. At the point of first interview, James was feeling 'very depressed' about having to go back, because the accommodation services he had been offered in the past 'were shit', and he was anxious about 'running into' people he would rather avoid. James was given a travel warrant and made the journey back independently, reporting to an agency that had been told to expect him upon arrival. He was then referred to a night shelter, but did not want to stay there 'because most of the people that stay there want my head', so slept rough for a week before then arranging to stay with a friend. He was then put in contact with a voluntary organisation where the staff were 'very helpful', linking him into other local services.

At the point of wave two interview James was living in a private rented sector bedsit in his home town and was regularly seeing his psychiatrist. He had successfully 'kept a low profile' and not come into contact with the people he was avoiding. He was doing a training course and planned to find a job and then perhaps travel overseas and work in the construction industry. He had still not been in contact with his family, who had 'disowned' him a long time ago, but was optimistic that one day he would one day 'prove them wrong' by succeeding in his career. James describes his experience of reconnection as a positive one overall, albeit that he would have liked more support after returning to his home town. He is grateful for the help received, but thinks that someone from the agency that reconnected him should have contacted him to check he was doing okay afterwards.

> **Box 3: Liam – reconnected but returned to identifying area**
>
> Aged 30, Liam grew up in the Midlands, but his family moved around a bit within the area during his childhood. He was living and working in a city within the area when he broke up with his girlfriend, lost his job, and things began to 'spiral out of control'. He moved to London in part because he wanted a 'fresh start' but also because they were 'no services available' where he came from. He slept rough upon arrival; this was his first ever experience of homelessness. It was difficult for reconnections staff to find a formal local connection given that he had moved around so much but he was told that he needed to move back to a town he had recently been in.
>
> The staff assisting him were 'absolutely brilliant'; his reconnections worker accompanied him on the train and took him to the night shelter that was expecting him and helped him fill in the relevant paperwork. Liam stayed one night but absolutely hated it because it was 'full of smackheads and thieves'. He was back in London by the time the agency that had reconnected him phoned to check he was okay. He stayed with someone he had met in a homelessness agency who had recently been accommodated in the private rented sector, and later took a room in the same private rented flat when it became available. Liam concludes that he is not averse to the concept of reconnection in principle; merely the fact that he had been put into 'a dump'. He has been doing training courses and hopes to get work soon but is conscious that he will have to downgrade his accommodation in order for it to be affordable.

all-night church and that but I said to them 'no, because the reason why I moved away from [name of town] was because the majority of people down here, they basically want my head'. I said to them, 'I'd rather stay on the street'."
(Rough sleeper, male, in teens, London Borough)

ii) Complied with reconnection offer, moved to recipient area, but subsequently returned to identifying area

Other individuals travelled to the recipient area, but subsequently returned to the identifying area because they found the arrangements unsatisfactory, either because the quality of accommodation was poor and/or offered only a short-term solution to their housing needs (see for example Boxes 3 and 4).

"They sent me to … this little pokey disgusting place … You couldn't get in until half nine at night and you had to be out by half seven in the morning … You couldn't leave your bags there or anything, so it was like you were carrying your bags around in the pouring rain, for like 11, 12

hours a day, and I just said 'I'm not going to do that' … So I stayed one night [and] I come back the day after on the train and stayed on the streets for another maybe three weeks to a month."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 30s, London Borough)

"They said to me, 'Oh, we can get you into a place in [name of town]'. It was like, 'Oh, alright, then, sound', thinking, you know, a hostel or something, fair enough … They just sent me down there … and it turned out it was a room in a night shelter where I could only stay for 28 days without local connections' [laughs]."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 40s, Eastern City)

The latter issue was widely reported by individuals who had been diverted. These individuals were more often than not denied accommodation and other services when they returned to the identifying area. In all such instances, the rough sleepers concerned sought their own accommodation solutions, by for example staying with family or friends, or sought the assistance of voluntary sector agencies who often tried to

Box 4: Robert – diverted but returned to identifying area

Robert is 31. He grew up in a children's care home in the Midlands, spent four years in the Armed Forces after leaving care at age 16, and has been homeless 'more or less ever since'. He explains that he has 'itchy feet', gets 'bored of places quickly' and moves around a lot as a result. He has lived in several different towns and cities within England and Scotland, but thinks he has probably spent around six of the last ten years in Eastern City, tending to return every 'year or two'. That said, he thinks his last settled home was probably a squat in a different town where he lived for a 'couple of years'. He doesn't really consider any place to be 'home'. Robert was living in a tent when street outreach workers in Eastern City told them they could get him accommodation in a nearby town. He decided to go, despite never having been there and not knowing anyone who lived in the town.

He was given a travel warrant, but upon arriving discovered that the accommodation he had been referred to was not a hostel as he had assumed, but a night shelter with a maximum 28 day stay for people who did not have a local connection to the town. There were no other services for homeless people there. The night shelter staff attempted to help him access a rent deposit scheme but he was not eligible for that because he had no local connection. He stayed for two weeks and then returned to Eastern City where he resumed living in his tent. Robert jokingly refers to his (failed) diversion as his 'holiday at the seaside'. He has subsequently been assisted to find temporary accommodation in Eastern City by a voluntary sector organisation. Robert thinks diversions such as his merely represent an attempt on the part of local authorities to 'fob people off', not least because he knows a number of homeless people who have been diverted from one city to another, only to be diverted elsewhere yet again.

Box 5: Ian – refused reconnection and continued rough sleeping in identifying area

Ian is 51 and grew up in a city in Northern England, but has lived and worked 'all over the place' throughout adulthood. He has been homeless for around five years and has spent most of that time sleeping rough, with intermittent periods spent in hostels. He slept rough in central London for around nine months before he was able to access hostel accommodation in London Borough. He made what he describes as a 'deliberate' decision to remain on the street for six months in order to be granted a local connection to the borough so that he would be eligible for accommodation. Ian wanted to stay in London because he had 'nothing to return to' anywhere else: things had 'never worked out' for him and he had never felt 'at home' anywhere. He knew that he could cope living on the streets of London, having been homeless there before. He did not claim benefits whilst sleeping rough, but explains that he 'did not starve' because he was able to use a number of day centre and similar services that do not employ a local connection rule.

Ian reports that street outreach workers discussed the option of reconnection with him but did not 'push it', presumably, he says, because they knew that he 'would just come straight back'. He explains that the street outreach workers were fully aware of his decision to refuse to be reconnected. They continued to wake him up periodically to check that he was okay. He is on medication for depression and has a problematic relationship with alcohol but has been dry for over a year. Ian is optimistic about his prospects at the moment, as he is now on a housing waiting list, and has done an Information Technology course at a homeless day centre so hopes to regain employment at some point in the future. He believes that reconnection teams are 'completely wasting their time' with long-term rough sleepers, or 'old-timers' as he calls them.

assist them to access private rented sector accommodation (see Chapter 4).

iii) Refused reconnection offer and remained street homeless in recipient area
A further group of individuals refused the reconnection offer and remained in the identifying area, often continuing to sleep rough as they had rendered themselves ineligible for most emergency accommodation services in the area by refusing to comply (see for example Box 5). These individuals generally reported making a conscious decision to 'dig their heels in' until such time as they would be granted a local connection in the identifying area.

"I was aware of that specific rule, you know? … So I stopped out and, you know, for nine month ... because I knew once I got over six months they would be required to help us ... It was a deliberate decision. If there's some people I come across who I know want to stop, that's a recommendation I will give, you know."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 50s, London Borough)
"What's really paid off for me is persistence, the willpower to stay on the streets and, you know, to keep saying 'You're not passing this problem on', and eventually like they've given in."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 30s, Eastern City)

iv) Refused reconnection offer and made alternative arrangements independently
Other rough sleepers also refused to comply with the insistence that they reconnect, but rather than sleep rough made their own alternative arrangements, either by independently accessing accommodation in the identifying area or somewhere else where they had (family) support networks (see for example Box 6).

"I didn't bother going. It doesn't make sense … No, I waited at the station, and my brother said to me, 'What are you going to do, go up there for what, to walk

around and do nothing?' I thought, 'Yes, you're right'. So what I done is I got my brother to book me a ticket to come to [name of city], and that's what I done. I phoned my cousin up and asked if it was all right and she said, 'Yes'."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 40s, London Borough)

The responses outlined above are necessarily confined to those rough sleepers it was possible to (re)establish contact with during the course of the research. Further research is needed to evaluate the outcomes for others, however, especially those who are deflected with little support and no follow-up in light of the lack of evidence on outcomes for this group (see Chapter 4). The lack of evidence regarding outcomes for this group remains an issue of ongoing concern for service providers in all the case study areas.

"The vast majority don't show up again … I've no idea where they go, no … That's something we don't really track very well because they disappear off the radar. So they go and rough sleep somewhere else maybe, squatting maybe, maybe go back home. Maybe do what they want to do in London; find work, get a flat … I don't know."
(Local key informant, London Borough)

5.4 Views on appropriateness and ethicality

Rough sleepers' views on the appropriateness and ethicality of reconnections were, in some ways, ambivalent. On one hand, the majority were sympathetic to resource constraints and expressed the view that access to homelessness services, and more importantly settled housing, should not be entirely unrestricted so as to ensure that the needs of 'local' rough sleepers were met.

> *"I've mixed feelings about that. I think the council are right in what they say that you don't have a local connection, because anyone could just turn up anywhere and expect them to house them, which personally I think that would be quite chaotic, to be honest. Then people that do deserve to be housed in that area miss out, so I do agree with that in a sense."*
> (Rough sleeper, male, in 30s, London Borough)

That said, they universally and resolutely expressed the view that rough sleepers should have a right to move to a new place if they were at risk of harm in their 'home' area, whether that potential harm be physical in nature (e.g. threats of violence), or psychological in nature (e.g. 'bad memories' due to bereavement or exploitation). Further to this, a minority questioned whether the denial of service to rough sleepers who refuse reconnection represents a contravention of 'human rights'.

> *"If they've got family and they're reconnecting them back to where their family is, I think that might be a good thing. But then if there's reasons why they don't want to go back, because of whatever, if there's a good enough reason, you know, they're scared to go back then they shouldn't send them back."*
> (Rough sleeper, male, in 50s, London Borough)

> *"Obviously in certain situations like, as I said, there's peoples' safety; like you could be sending them back into the lion's den.*

Box 6: Brian – refused reconnection and made own alternative arrangements

Brian is 41 and a 'Londoner born and bred', having spent his entire childhood there. Most of his family members, including all his siblings, live in or near the borough they grew up in. He has lived and worked 'all over the place', and spent the last three years in a city in northern England where he lived with his partner. He decided to move 'home' to London after suffering a 'messy' relationship break-up and getting 'into a bit of trouble with the wrong sort of people'. He has always felt safe in London and has family and friends there. Brian slept rough upon arrival because he did not want to burden his siblings who already live in overcrowded housing, nor have his nieces and nephews see him when he was 'in a bit of a state'.

Brian was furious when reconnection workers told him that his local connection was in the city he had just come from and that he must return. He did not want to go, in part because he felt he would be at serious risk of harm if he did so. He told the reconnection workers about the threats he'd received from members of the drug community there, but they were unable to take account of that because the incidents had never been reported to the police. Brian accepted the offer of a train ticket and got as far as the station, but then decided that he really could not face going. He contacted his cousin in another city altogether and asked if he could stay. A brother paid for the new ticket, and he had been staying with his cousin for a month at the point of interview.

Brian thinks reconnection might be appropriate in some cases but certainly was not in his, given that he was effectively told that he could not use services in his 'home' city where he has family ties, but rather had to go back to somewhere he believes his life would have been at threat. He is very angry that no-one phoned to check up on him, feeling that 'they're not interested' now that he is 'off their books'.

I think that's a big factor, yes. If that's the case, if you're sending someone back to be slaughtered then that's not an option at all is it, really? I think peoples' safety should come before anything…"
(Rough sleeper, male, in 30s, London Borough)

"I'd be looking at very closely the human rights laws on this reconnections thing, because I have a horrible feeling it's in breach of a few. Because you can't forcibly move somebody to a different area."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 30s, Eastern City)

On these grounds, rough sleeper interviewees generally agreed that reconnection was justified if rough sleepers had abandoned legitimate connections (e.g. positive family support and/or services in their home area), were returning voluntarily, were not at risk of harm, and were provided with sufficient support before, during and after the process. They believed that such circumstances were relatively rare, however, and that reconnection did, for the most part, represent an unjustifiable abdication of duties toward rough sleepers on the part of local authorities.

"To be honest, it just seems they're trying to fob the problem off onto other people. They're not actually dealing with it, are they? All they're doing is moving people around the country. Because there's a lot of people you meet in the other night shelters who have been moved around for months because of this reconnections thing. There's one guy who got moved from [name of city] to [name of another city]; that outreach then did the reconnections thing and moved him somewhere else."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 20s, Eastern City)

5.5 Impact on rough sleeper numbers

Stakeholders emphasised that it was very difficult if not impossible to ascertain what (if any) impact reconnection policies had had on rough sleeper numbers at the local level, given the potential influence of a plethora of other factors such as the economic recession, changing rights of EU migrant groups, welfare reform, the national roll-out of NSNO, and/or changes in the availability of hostel bed spaces in some localities, to name but a few examples.

"What impact has it had on rough sleeper numbers? It really is impossible to say. There's been so many other things going on, what with changes in migration, especially from central and eastern Europe, hostel closures … all these things. How do you disentangle all that? You tell me! [laughs]."
(Local key informant, London Borough)

That said, stakeholders in Eastern City attributed an increase in the proportion of rough sleepers with a local connection to the town in recent years to the local implementation of these measures. There, the percentage ratio of recorded rough sleepers with:without a local connection altered from approximately 30:70 to 70:30 between 2011 and 2013.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has revealed that rough sleepers' moves to the places where they were targeted for reconnection were generally prompted by a combination of: firstly, push factors, typically broken relationships and/or perceived risk of harm in the area they have left; and secondly, pull factors, which generally include perceptions regarding the safety, anonymity, camaraderie, opportunity and availability of services within, and/or fond associations with, their destination.

A distinction can be made between the experiences of individuals affected by intra-city reconnections, that is, reconnections

from one London borough to another, and inter-city reconnections, that is, moves from one town/city to another. Rough sleepers experiencing an intra-city move generally did not view it as reconnection *per se*, but rather considered the process to offer valuable personalised advocacy assisting them to access services to which they were entitled in their 'home' borough.

In contrast, inter-city reconnected generally recalled being confused, upset and/or angry at the prospect of being reconnected, in part due to lack of clarity regarding local connection assessment criteria, but most commonly because of the primacy accorded to last place of settled residence and comparative lack of recognition given to the presence of family in local connection assessments. Levels of anger and anxiety were particularly acute amongst those who believed they would be at risk of harm if they returned but had no formal (police) evidence of threat.

The level and nature of support provided to reconnected rough sleepers varied significantly, as did their response to the reconnection process. Whilst it was not possible to quantify precisely what proportion experienced specific outcomes, the study suggested that rough sleepers tended to follow one of four general response trajectories, in that they would either: i) comply with the reconnection offer, move to and remain in the recipient area; ii) comply with the reconnection offer and move to the recipient area but subsequently return to the identifying area; iii) refuse the reconnection offer and remain street homeless in the identifying area; or iv) refuse to be reconnected and make accommodation arrangements independently.

Key things to note from such patterns are that a number of reconnected individuals did sleep rough in the recipient area, even if only for a short time, given the inadequacy or unpalatability of services they were

referred to. Further to this, the ability of those whom made alternative arrangements was, inevitably, contingent on them having the capabilities, confidence and/or contacts (e.g. family) to do so. Also notably, all of the individuals who were diverted questioned the logic underpinning the intervention, and whilst their immediate accommodation needs were met, they remained ineligible for settled accommodation given their lack of local connection in the recipient area.

It is not clear what, if any, impact reconnection policies and practice has had on the overall prevalence of rough sleeping, given difficulty disentangling their influence from that of other factors affecting the scale and nature of street homelessness in recent years (e.g. changing migration patterns, welfare reform, the economic recession etc.).

Rough sleeper interviewees typically interpreted reconnections as an attempt on the part of local authorities to avoid taking responsibility for vulnerable individuals. This had had the unintended negative consequence of strengthening the resolve of many to 'fight the system' by refusing to engage with the reconnection process. That said, rough sleepers generally agreed that reconnection was justifiable in situations where rough sleepers had abandoned legitimate connections (e.g. positive family support and/or services in their home area), were returning voluntarily, were not at risk of harm should they return, and were provided with sufficient support before, during and after the reconnection process. They universally and resolutely believed that no-one should be forced to return to an area where they felt that they would be at risk of physical or psychological harm, however.

6. Effectiveness, limits and risks

This chapter reviews the 'lessons learned' regarding the circumstances in which reconnection is most and least likely to lead to positive outcomes for rough sleepers, before then assessing the limits and risks associated with the approach. It draws upon interviews with national and local key informants, frontline practitioners and rough sleepers.

6.1 Likelihood of working

The evaluation indicated that the likelihood of an attempted reconnection 'working', that is, successfully supporting a rough sleeper to return to somewhere where they can access accommodation and (re)integrate into services and/or social support networks, is influenced by a number of factors. Some of these relate to the personal circumstances of the individual targeted; others to the way in which the intervention is implemented. These are summarised below, beginning with those factors that appear to increase the likelihood of the intervention working, followed by those that evidence suggests reduces its potential effectiveness.

6.1.1 Reconnection is *most* likely to work when…

i) …connections to the destination area are meaningful

There was strong consensus amongst interviewees that reconnection is most effective when rough sleepers have meaningful connections to the recipient area, especially when that is somewhere they consider to be 'home' and/or where they have legitimate (positive) social support networks. On this account, whilst some rough sleepers are apparently less resistant to diversion than reconnection (see Chapter 4), outcomes are generally better for those returning to somewhere that they do have genuine connections.

"If they really do have a family that's going to be supportive rather than just the local authority … I think it works better … Whereas, if you're just sending someone back to a borough that will take responsibility for them and they get a bedsit or they get a place in a hostel and they just feel isolated and alone and they don't have any people connections, then it may well break down and they come back."
(Local key informant, London)

"We started collecting data [so that] we could differentiate between reconnection and relocation [outcomes] … and probably nine out of ten relocations failed, particularly with young people … We would ring a month later, two months later, and three months later and generally by the first month 'phone call people [had] abandoned … because we were setting people up to fail."
(Local key informant, Northern City)

ii) …rough sleepers have a (recent) confirmed history of service use in the recipient area

In a similar vein, outcomes tend to be better when rough sleepers have a history of service use in the recipient area, especially where this is recent, given the greater likelihood that they will be positively received by relevant agencies and/or that their own familiarity with the 'system' in that place will (in some but not all cases) increase the likelihood that they will engage with the support on offer.

"Where people have social workers, or CMHT [community mental health team] mental health workers or who have got a structure that you're imbedding them back into, we can really establish that there are statutory responsibilities in places. Actually … they left for a period but actually it's better for them to return, then it works well."
(Local key informant, London Borough)

"If they've got a service where they've come from, or very often have got a tenancy, those are the most successful reconnections because we know they're going back to something. Often the discussion I have is you know, 'I can talk to the services you're with, if you're unhappy with whatever's happening and maybe we can negotiate something that's a bit more acceptable for you', and that's helpful."
(Frontline worker, London Borough)

iii) …targeted individuals are newly homeless or recent arrivals to the identifying area

'New' rough sleepers, especially those who have recently arrived in the identifying area are generally reported to be easier to reconnect than those with a longer history of homelessness (see below). Their connections in the destination area are more likely to be 'live', even if they require some degree of reparation. Moreover, they are less likely to have become familiar with (and potentially engrained in) street culture and/or street-based peer networks.

"I think where it's worked well, it's where … we've managed to pick them up quite quickly and they've not spiralled into kind of alcoholism or nasty mental health issues … Whereas, maybe six months' later then the embarrassment factor of going home or the shame, or the fear I guess … and also they may have got themselves in with a little group where they feel 'Well, these are my friends now, I don't really want to go back'."
(Local key informant, London Borough)

"Reconnection is very, very useful for those that have come to [Northern City] because they think the streets are paved with gold … that there's work here, that kind of thing, and they come here with very little resources but they've got very little experience of homelessness and rough sleeping. It can be a fairly straight forward reconnection for that person."
(Key informant, Northern City)

iv) …time is invested in brokering support in the recipient area

There was unanimous agreement that positive outcomes are most likely when support workers actively broker a formal offer of support from recipient authorities or agencies. Stakeholders reported that this process could be very time-intensive, especially if workers need to act as advocates. Frontline workers emphasised that accompanying rough sleepers to the recipient area and personally facilitating the handover of care should be seen as best practice, but acknowledged that this is not always possible due to resource constraints, especially when large distances are involved.

"It's really, really time intensive [accompanying rough sleepers to Housing Options in recipient areas] and it does work, because if you go and advocate for your client you are a hundred times more likely to get that outcome. If the client goes on their own [blows raspberry] … It's about saying, 'That's not acceptable … You're not going to fob this guy off with that one, sorry. He's entitled to more than that.'"
(Local key informant, London Borough)

"Ideally we should meet or have had a phone contact with a floating support worker or someone before we disengage … Being able to actually hand it on to someone else, give them another place of contact, would be ideal and it's not always done. So for vulnerable clients that need support, I think that would be to support them until they have local services in place."
(Frontline worker, London Borough)

"[Name of reconnections worker] travelled up with me … explained it all to one of the housing officers, but he was reluctant to help … I think that if I didn't have that I probably would have just ended up on the street in [name of city] …. I don't think they would have helped me otherwise."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 50s, London Borough)

v) …targeted individuals are given choice regarding where and how they are reconnected

A number of interviewees suggested that rough sleepers are more likely to engage positively with reconnection efforts if they are given at least some degree of say in where they are reconnected to and/or which services or relatives will be involved in facilitating their (re)integration into that community.

> "A lot of local authorities, unlike [London Borough], are actually a lot more flexible around their local connection and a lot more agreeable to having people come to their area. Especially if there's some kind of link, like actually they've got a cousin there or they went to school there, or something like that. Or, 'I've got good memories about that area' … Clients were very happy to go, because it was their choice and they weren't being forced… I think, really, it needs to be an agreed plan."
> (Local key informant, London Borough)

vi) …the reconnection offer is presented in a positive manner

Stakeholders reported that rough sleepers tend to be more likely to engage with the reconnection process if the offer is presented in a positive manner, that is, is presented as a concerted effort to assist them within the context of constrained resources. Such an approach can reduce the potential for those affected to interpret it as an uncaring or punitive attempt to 'send them away'.

> "It doesn't happen anymore, but I can certainly remember staff shouting through the window, 'You can't come in, you've been reconnected!' That's completely contrary to what you actually want a reconnection to be … The message needs to be something like 'Although you can't access [London Borough] provision due to the policy on meeting local connection we want to do everything we can to assist you'."
> (Local key informant, London Borough)

6.1.2 Reconnection is *least* likely to work when…

i) …rough sleepers are resistant to the idea of returning

As noted in Chapters 4 and 5, reconnections are less likely to 'work' when targeted individuals are resistant, particularly if they fear that they might be at risk of harm should they return to where they have an identified connection.

> "[Sometimes] they've come from a place where something's happened and they get very stuck on the streets and they just exhibit quite depressive behaviour. I think if some sort of breakdown has occurred, and the offer of going back to that place where the breakdown has occurred isn't particularly palatable, that is fair enough."
> (Local key informant, London Borough)

> "If they've lost work, if they've lost all their relationships, if they've fallen out, they're escaping drug debts, all these kinds of things are legitimate reasons for why someone doesn't want to return. So if you're pushing someone back, it's just not going to work."
> (Local key informant, London Borough)

ii) …targeted individuals have a long history of homelessness

It was widely agreed that reconnection is generally unpalatable to, and less effective with, individuals with a long history of homelessness, especially where that has involved sustained or repeat periods of rough sleeping and/or they have especially complex needs such as severe substance misuse or mental health problems.

> "If they've got a history of rough sleeping they're often more complex and it's not just as simple as saying, you've been in Hull the last eight months you've got to go back there. They're not going to do it, anyone with a history of rough sleeping is definitely more complex so they do need

that further engagement."
(Local key informant, London Borough)

"Reconnections is much more effective for people who've been on the streets for a shorter period of time than for those … who are on the streets because of complex trauma… Those ones are much more difficult because actually the problem isn't about somewhere to live … The problems are psychological and emotional, and they have to be dealt with first. Reconnections don't really work for those smaller but really difficult numbers of people who have been out for ten years or more, because where would you reconnect them?"
(National key informant)

iii) …insufficient support is provided

Unsurprisingly, reconnections are deemed to be less effective if insufficient support is provided by the identifying area and/ or recipient areas in the lead up to, during and/or after reconnection. The process of deflection, as described in Chapter 4, was targeted for particular criticism in this regard; but reconnection and diversion strategies were not immune from critique, especially in instances where the provision of support in either the identifying or recipient areas was inadequate or poorly coordinated.

"We're under loads of pressure funding-wise but certainly would never just say 'Here's your ticket to [name of city], bye' … We know that people just either not use the ticket or they sell it, or they get to [name of city] and think, 'Oh, I remember why I left now', and come right back."
(Local key informant, London Borough)

"We saw lots of bad examples of reconnection where people were just given a letter to go to Housing Options in another city from some outreach team … Everybody knows, probably including the client, that when they rock up in [name of town] at Housing Options they get told they're not statutory and there's no accommodation,

there's nothing can be done."
(National key informant interview)

iv) …recipient areas are very distant from identifying areas

In addition, frontline workers reported that reconnection tends to be more difficult logistically and/or potentially likely to fail when the geographical distances involved are great. This, they note, is caused, in part, by their lesser ability to travel with rough sleepers and facilitate the handover of care, but also their limited knowledge of service networks and contacts in geographically distant parts of the UK. This, they noted, restricted their ability to assess the suitability of, and/or broker access to, support projects.

6.2 Limits and risks

The study also highlighted a number of limits and risks associated with reconnections, some of which raise significant ethical questions. These include the following:

i) Denial of essential services to people without a local connection anywhere

The stringent application of the *Code of Guidance* local connection criteria by many local authorities – and the prioritisation of the three out of five year 'hurdle' in some – means that UK citizens who become homeless after a period living abroad can find themselves unable to access temporary accommodation and other basic services in their 'home' area, even if they have very strong family connections or a history of working there. At present, diversion to an area or service that does not employ local connection criteria can be the only option available to such individuals.

> *"We get a lot of British nationals who have lived and worked abroad for a while, so that's a tricky one, because they are eligible for their benefits and they're British … [But] they can't access anything here … All we can do is [look] at anywhere that they're willing to relocate really."*
> (Frontline worker, London Borough)

> *"I was really worried when I got here [after being deported back to UK] because people were saying to me 'Oh, they give you a ticket home'. I said, 'Where's my fucking home?', you know? … I've been overseas so long I don't have a fucking home any more, there is no local connection. Any council they tried just said 'He's been gone too long, he's not coming back here'."*
> (Rough sleeper, male, in 50s, London Borough)

ii) Uncertainty regarding the legitimacy and/or severity of risk to rough sleepers in recipient areas

This issue is particularly acute where rough sleepers claim to be fleeing drug-related violence or the threat thereof, given that these are very unlikely to have been reported to the police and thus remain 'unevidenced' formally, even if legitimate. As noted in Chapter 4, this presents a profound ethical quandary for frontline workers given the potential consequences of getting judgements on this wrong.

> *"Quite often people come down here saying they can't go back [because they are at risk of harm], and actually a little bit more investigation will prove actually it's not the case at all. In some cases, it has turned out to be absolutely genuine … You know we did contact agencies and they were saying, 'Yes, we do know this person. We do know that he's been involved in this, and we think that there might be some risk involved if he does come back'."*
> (Frontline worker, London Borough)

iii) Rough sleepers' reasons for moving may be highly complex and difficult to assess

The complexity of an individual's pathway into rough sleeping can make it exceptionally difficult for frontline workers to determine whether reconnection is an appropriate option, especially given the tight time-frames that most reconnection and outreach workers must work to. Furthermore, it is widely recognised that many vulnerable individuals will only share the 'full story' when they have an established relationship with a trusted support worker, and the development of this relationship takes time.

> *"We may not always understand people's motives for leaving an area, and we might be guilty of not being informed or thoughtful enough about how to respond in those issues. I think somebody who might be fleeing circumstances … might*

not necessarily go up to a service and say 'I've ran away because I'm being persecuted around my sexuality'. I think that's a challenge to whether reconnection is the right thing to do."
(Local key informant, London Borough)

iv) Inadequate service responses in some recipient areas

Variability in the receptiveness or availability of services in destination local authorities, and limited amount of follow-up after reconnection by staff in identifying areas, means that there will always be a risk that the accommodation and/or other needs of reconnected rough sleepers may not be met sufficiently in recipient areas.

"My experience is someone will say 'Yes, if they get here by six they'll probably get a bed', those kinds of things and then when they get there there's no accommodation for them."
(National key informant)

"I just think we could challenge the certainty with which we say its right to reconnect someone back to [name of city], because it may still be that that's the area in which they're most likely to be offered a service, but that still may be nothing."
(Local key informant, London Borough)

"I wouldn't want to go back, like, I really wouldn't, because there's nothing up there. The housing, the best way to say it, it's shit … There's nothing up there, like, there's nothing whatsoever. So I don't know what to do, to be honest."
(Rough sleeper, male, in teens, London Borough)

v) Potential for increasing (some) rough sleepers' resistance to support services

As noted in Chapters 4 and 5, reconnection attempts can hinder some individuals' preparedness to engage with support and, in extreme cases, strengthen their resolve to remain on the streets. This risk is particularly acute when reconnection is presented as a single service offer.

"There's a client who was given a very strong message to return to where he'd just come from, decided no, he was going to be the voice of the homeless and get a connection, and he's been here in the same spot for nearly four years … and is now ensuring everyone knows how to get a connection."
(Frontline worker, London Borough)

"[Name of agency] were the biggest skanks going … As I said, to the guy … 'Your website is saying, 'Our doors are open 24/7, we never turn no-one away, there's always a hot meal, and if we can, a bed' … and what not. I couldn't even get to use the toilet."
(Rough sleeper, male, in 40s, London Borough)

vi) Weak or non-existent social support networks in recipient areas

Contrary to the assumptions underpinning the use of reconnections as a response to rough sleeping (see Chapters 1 and 2), the majority of rough sleepers do not have strong social support networks or 'social capital' in their home area. Stakeholders consistently emphasised that most have 'burned bridges' with family members and/or peer networks such that there are no, or at best only very precarious, support networks to tap into.

"Hypothetically I guess that it's [reconnection is] a good idea. But it assumes that everybody has a home and everybody has a place where they'll be more than happy to be reconnected to. Sadly that's not the case. … Most of the people we work with don't feel that they have the support network because they've burnt all their bridges with their family, their friends or their relationship breakdown."
(Key informant, London Borough)

"My family imploded, you know, when I was a youngster … So there's nothing really for me to go to [name of city] for …

*Things have not worked out for, you know,
sometimes losing a job or not getting
the right accommodation or, you know, a
multitude of reasons … I don't consider
anywhere home, I never have done."*
(Rough sleeper, male, in 50s, London
Borough)

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter has reported on the basis of the
evidence available that reconnections appear
most likely to be effective when: rough
sleepers' connections to the recipient area
are meaningful; they have a (recent) history of
service use in the destination area; targeted
individuals are newly homeless or recent
arrivals; time is invested in brokering support
in the recipient area; targeted individuals are
given choice regarding where and how they
are reconnected; and the reconnection offer
is presented in a positive manner.

Conversely, reconnection seems less likely
to lead to positive outcomes when: rough
sleepers are resistant to the idea of returning;
targeted individuals have a long history
of homelessness; insufficient support is
provided before, during and/or after the
reconnection; and/or recipient areas are
geographically very distant from identifying
areas.

The evaluation also highlighted a number
of limits and risks associated with
reconnections, including: the denial of
essential services to rough sleepers with
no local connection anywhere in the UK;
uncertainty regarding the legitimacy and/
or severity of risk to rough sleepers in
recipient areas; the complexity of and
difficulty assessing rough sleepers' reasons
for moving; inadequate service responses
in some recipient areas; the potential for
exacerbating rough sleepers' resistance to
support services; and the fragility or lack of
rough sleepers' social support networks in
recipient areas.

7. Conclusion

Drawing upon a series of national key informant interviews and case studies in four English local authorities, this study has assessed the effectiveness of domestic reconnections, that is, the reconnection of British national rough sleepers within the UK. It has revealed that whilst the intervention is justifiable and has the potential to generate positive outcomes in some circumstances, there is a disjuncture between recognised good practice and the way in which reconnection is often implemented 'on the ground'.

In practice, reconnection is a term used in reference to a relatively wide range of interventions. These include: *reconnection (proper),* wherein rough sleepers are supported to return to a place where they have some established link; *diversion* wherein rough sleepers are encouraged or supported to access services in another area where they do not have any connection; and *deflection* wherein they are encouraged or instructed to return to a home area but no attempt is made to assess the nature or strength of connections or to broker support in potential recipient areas.

Data on the scale and nature of reconnections remain extremely limited, in large part due to difficulties following up service users after reconnection. That said, existing data suggest that inter-city reconnections, that is, the reconnection of British nationals from one urban centre to another within the UK, comprise the majority of reconnections from some areas. In London, these are outnumbered by international reconnections (involving moves abroad) and intra-city reconnections (from one borough to another).

A distinction can generally be made between the experiences of rough sleepers targeted for intra-city and inter-city reconnection.

Whilst rough sleepers tend not to consider the former to be reconnections *per se,* they greatly value the advocacy and practical support offered by reconnection workers which help them negotiate access to services they should be entitled to in their home borough.

The level of support typically received by individuals reconnected within the capital is not necessarily replicated elsewhere, or for those being reconnected further afield, however. On the contrary, whilst some rough sleepers feel well supported in the lead up to and during the reconnection process, they appear to be outnumbered by those whom are provided with minimal support. Further to this, post-reconnection checks are very rare, hence many reconnected individuals feel 'fobbed off'. Furthermore, awareness of and data collected on reconnection outcomes remains extremely limited, making it extremely difficult to fully assess the impact of the policy.

Of the interventions falling under the umbrella of reconnection, diversion deviates most substantially from the core principles of reconnection guidance endorsed at national level. Perhaps surprisingly, diversion tends to be more palatable than reconnection in the eyes of some rough sleepers, given that they are not being required to return to somewhere they would rather avoid, but evidence suggests that diversion outcomes are consistently poorer than are reconnection outcomes. Questions also remain over the justifiability of deflections, especially given the dearth of evidence regarding the characteristics of, and outcomes for, those affected.

Rough sleepers' responses to reconnection are variable, and whilst positive outcomes for them are more likely in particular circumstances (e.g. when they are willing to return, connections are meaningful and

tailored support is provided), evidence suggests that many homeless people are very resistant. Levels of resistance are greatest where rough sleepers believe they may be at risk of harm in the recipient area and/or the services offered are of poor quality and/or provide only a short-term solution to their housing and other needs. In such circumstances, reconnected individuals typically remain in or return to rough sleeping, be that in the identifying or recipient area.

The evaluation has highlighted a number of key tensions, dissonances and ethical issues inherent within reconnection policy and practice. Many of these are particularly acute when reconnections are employed as part of a single service offer, given the potential for non-compliance to render targeted individuals ineligible for services in the identifying area. These issues include but are not limited to:

- the erroneous presumption, strongly voiced in reconnections policy rhetoric, that rough sleepers have positive social support networks in their last place of residence;

- the rigid prioritisation of last place of normal residence by some local authorities in assessments of local connection, such that legitimate positive support networks elsewhere may be (and sometimes are) overlooked;

- profound difficulties assessing the legitimacy and severity of risks to rough sleepers in recipient areas and potential implications of getting such assessments wrong;

- the reliance of frontline workers on non-interventionist services (e.g. night shelters and soup kitchens) to meet the essential living needs of individuals who refuse reconnection, when such agencies are simultaneously criticised for undermining reconnection policies; and

- the denial of services to rough sleepers who do not have any local connection as defined in the Code of Guidance (most notably those who have been living outside the UK for longer than three years).

These issues are particularly significant given that evidence regarding the impacts of reconnection remains extremely limited. Further to this, some councils are tightening their local connection criteria (e.g. as in Seaside Town where the six out of 12 months normal residence criterion has been dropped) such that it will be increasingly difficult for rough sleepers to provide evidence of a connection. These trends inevitably raise questions about the potential implications for reconnections policy, and the provision of services to single homeless people more generally, if they are indicative of a general trend toward a 'raising of drawbridges' by local authorities across the country.

A much broader debate needs to be had as regards the appropriateness of using the *Code of Guidance* local connection criteria to restrict rough sleepers' eligibility for accommodation and other building based services. Furthermore, both receiving and identifying local authorities need to be reminded of their duties of care toward single homeless people (as regards the provision of meaningful and appropriate advice and assistance, at least). Those important issues notwithstanding, and given the likelihood of reconnection remaining as a policy response to street homelessness, recommendations emerging from the study include the following:

- *Who* should be reconnected? Reconnection can be appropriate, and potentially beneficial, when rough sleepers have recently made an unplanned move and/or abandoned 'live' connections or support services. Caution is however necessary when considering whether it is appropriate to reconnect individuals with complex support needs and/or

long histories of street homelessness. Particularly, given that they are unlikely to have existing (positive) support networks to link into and are likely to be resistant even if presented with a single service offer. Furthermore, reconnection should not be pursued with individuals for whom there are reasonable grounds to believe that they will be at risk of harm should they return. Even if there is no 'proof' in the form of police records, evidence via contact with other agencies in the recipient area, should be considered substantial.

- *Where* should they be reconnected? Reconnection should generally only be pursued when rough sleepers have meaningful connections, in the form of prior service use and/or the presence of positive social support networks. Targeted individuals' views and preferences as to where they have connections should not be over-ridden by rigidly enforced local connection criterion.The appropriateness of the support should be rigorously assessed by reconnection workers. Further to this, rough sleepers' last place of settled residence should not automatically be given precedence over other legitimate forms of connection; rather, social support (especially family networks) should be taken into consideration if appropriate.

- *How* should they be reconnected? Agreed good practice, already published in national guidance (Homeless Link, 2014b), should be adhered to much more consistently than it is at present. There is a case for introducing a national standard for reconnection, given the incidence of poor practice. This should insist that all reconnected individuals be offered a minimum level of support, sufficiently resourced, before, during and after the reconnection process. Referrals to poor quality or insecure (time-limited) accommodation settings should be avoided insofar as possible.

- *Data collection:* rough sleepers and named contacts in recipient agencies/authorities should be followed up after every reconnection as standard procedure and outcomes recording improved significantly. This would not only serve to protect against potential negative impacts but also improve the currently weak evidence base on reconnection outcomes. Suitable funding should be allocated to allow local authorities to do this.

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Appendix A Number of rough sleeper / homeless person interviews, by case study area

	Interviewed when targeted (i.e. wave one) ONLY	Interviewed after being targeted/ reconnected (i.e. retrospectively/wave 2) ONLY	Interviewed before and after being targeted/ reconnected (i.e. in BOTH waves 1 and 2)
London Borough	21	8	3
Seaside Town	3	-	1
Eastern City	6	-	1
Northern City	-	1	-
Total	30	9	5

About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people.
Our purpose is to end homelessness.

Crisis helps people rebuild their lives through housing, health, education and employment services. We work with thousands of homeless people across the UK and have ambitious plans to work with many more.

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