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Dear Director

### **Rough Sleeping - Local Connection policies**

I am writing in relation to local Authorities imposing/applying local connection policies to people sleeping rough. This letter reminds you of government strategy and advises you of the measures we intend to take as a response to this growing issue.

Firstly, I would like to stress that the success of achieving the two thirds reduction in the number of rough sleepers is a result of effective partnership working between local authorities, voluntary sector agencies and other players. The most visible form of homelessness is now at its lowest levels and local authorities are to be congratulated on their key role in this achievement. We aim to maintain this success and reduce still further the numbers sleeping rough in central London. To this end we provide grant aid to each Local Authority to tackle rough sleeping as part of their homelessness strategy. My officials remain in contact with many authorities offering advice, help and support to ensure the rough sleeping target is sustained

Our approach has been to help those who are most vulnerable or at greatest risk, while building up a more effective system for meeting wider housing and support needs. Our 2002 report, ***More than a roof***, set out new approaches to tackle the personal and social causes of homelessness alongside structural issues like housing supply. In addition, the Supporting People programme provides services to around 1.2 million people and around £440 million (05/06) funds services to rough sleepers, single homeless people and homeless children and families.

Our work on rough sleeping has led us to understand the importance of direct access or low threshold services in tackling rough sleeping and that these frequently act as a county, sub-regional or regional resource for rough sleepers. Cross authority working of this nature has enabled significant numbers of rough sleepers to move from the streets to a more settled and supported environment. This is clearly apparent across the country where urban centres support rural partners, and across London where authorities rely on co-operation in meeting need.

We are now however, faced with increasing concern from across the sector that the application of stringent local connections policies are denying vulnerable people access to services. Concerns expressed to us include that these policies will lead to a rise in rough sleeping and

that a mobile client group will be encouraged to become more so. Such policies are clearly contrary to the spirit of our strategy for tackling homelessness "Sustainable Communities: settled homes; changing lives" I am sure you will agree that further disenfranchising vulnerable and mobile client groups does not meet our shared interests nor meet need.

We do recognise however that there is wide variation in how local connections policies are applied and considered. We are aware of some authorities who use "reconnections" policies to encourage rough sleepers to take up services in the appropriate authority where they are more likely to have community links and be able to access services.. In this context best practice is achieved where the reconnection occurs in an informed and planned manner. This enables services appropriate to need to be made available by the receiving area.

Reconnection will not be appropriate for some rough sleepers. For instance, those who are too vulnerable to return anywhere and those who have no realistic local connection anywhere.

We intend to produce best practice for Local Authorities on reconnection . To take this forward, we will work with local authorities and key voluntary sector partners to develop this. — We will explore the extent to which reconnections policies bring benefits to rough sleepers and as we implement the Homelessness and Supporting People Strategies we will further explore the issue of Local Connections and take this into account.

You will wish to see my corresponding letter of 10 August to Supporting People Commissioning Body Leads. (copy enclosed). This is also available on the SPK website ([www.spkweb.org.uk](http://www.spkweb.org.uk)).

Yours faithfully,

**Terrie Alafat**

Cc Regional Government Offices, LGA, GLA, ALG, Shelter, Homeless Link, Sitra, National Federation Housing Associations,