

HSR ACCESS AND ENTRY CRITERIA (Final)

Introduction

HSR based services are funded by Bristol City Council's Supporting People Service and are commissioned for people who are homeless or are at risk of losing their home due to an inability to cope with the demands and requirements of living independently, not for the general public as a whole.

Due to the scarcity of these commissioned services relative to demand it is essential that the City Council allocates them on a principle of 'priority to those in greatest need' and also sets clear guidance to referrers and applicants on the basic eligibility rules that apply.

The purpose of this section of policy is therefore to set out the basic criteria under which applicants are eligible for entry to the HSR and its commissioned services. The guidance below should be used to establish whether or not an applicant is eligible. Where the referrer is satisfied that they meet the eligibility criteria, they may proceed to make a referral to suitable services. **If you are not satisfied then it is essential that no matches or referrals to provider services are made at all. Please seek advice from SPA (Single Point of Access Team) using hsr.admin@bristol.gov.uk**

As a referrer for a client you should also be aware that the services available via the Housing Support Register, are short term commissioned services ie they provide support for up to two years. However to be very clear Supporting People and City Council Commissioners expect that clients move on within services and should not be referred to a provider and advised that they will remain with that providers for two years. The HSR Directory gives clear indication of each providers expected length of stay for each of their services.

Where the referrer is satisfied that the applicant does **not** meet all four eligibility criteria, they should **not** refer the applicant to any services. They should advise the applicant that they are not eligible and consider what other assistance may be available.

The four key eligibility criteria are:

- 1.Applicant must be 'vulnerable',**
- 2.Applicant must be in need of 'housing-related support' to prevent homelessness or to assist a client who is homeless,**
- 3.Applicant to Accommodation Based or Floating Support services must have recourse to public funds,**
- 4.Applicant must have a clear local connection with Bristol, or have special circumstances (which can be evidenced) to show why a move to Bristol to obtain supported housing is needed.**

Further guidance on these criteria is given below.

Please note that certain exceptions apply to HSR Drugs and Alcohol services, and these can be seen in section 6 of the following :

1.Vulnerability

People with clear evidence of the following issues can be regarded as vulnerable. Please note that this list is not exhaustive: All referral agents should note that this guidance is to highlight that the categories list below can confer or suggest vulnerability. A clear common sense approach to vulnerability is recommended as is the need to be very clear with clients that they may have no support needs and therefore cannot be referred for services using the Housing Support Register.

- mental health problems; diagnosed or undiagnosed
- learning disabilities;
- at risk of or victim of domestic violence/abuse;
- teenage pregnancy;
- a rough sleeper with support needs, whose rough sleeping history has been verified by the City's Outreach Service.
- history of prolific offending or at risk of prolific offending (includes offenders eligible under the previous Bristol Gateway programme);
- young people aged 16 or 17 years old.
- 18 year (+)former relevant child in care .
- drug and alcohol problems;
- physical or sensory disability;
- long term diagnosed medical condition

2. Housing-related support needs

Generally, 'Housing-related support' is that which **develops an individual's capacity to live independently in the community, or sustains their capacity to do so**. It is intended to be preventative and enabling.

It is aimed at providing support to an individual who might remain in or be admitted to institutional care, or become homeless or suffer loss of accommodation if support were not provided.

It will be based on an agreement between the service provider and the user to provide and receive support, with agreed objectives.

Housing-related support services can be defined as practical support tasks that enable vulnerable people to live as independently as possible in the community. Housing-related support services are services provided over and above basic housing management services **but they do not include personal care services**.

In summary and using plain English, the Housing support register does not offer access to long-term care based services or support. Although the definition of support needs for a client (sometimes referred to as "vulnerability ") is lower than that commonly used to determine Priority need for Statutory Homeless applications, any referral agent who intends to place a client onto the Housing Support Register must be able to evidence and demonstrate that the client has a housing related support need – and that receiving the support service through accommodation based or floating support services, will allow them

to retain accommodation or access accommodation and develop their ability/capacity for sustainable independent living.

The Housing Support Register should not be accessed by clients who approach HSR partners simply to resolve a housing crisis where no support needs, over and above the housing crisis itself, have been identified or disclosed.

Reminder: All services accessible via the HSR are short term only ie a maximum of two years. Longer- term support services are accessible through other routes.

3. Recourse to Public Funds and Social Housing

a) Public Funds

Applicants to Accommodation Based services must have recourse to public funds. If an applicant can provide evidence that they are eligible for housing under Part 6 or Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 or are currently in receipt of any of the benefits listed below, they will usually already have been assessed as having recourse to public funds:

- Income Support;
- Council Tax Benefit;
- Housing Benefit
- Attendance Allowance;
- Employment and Support Allowance;
- Severe Disablement Allowance;
- Invalid Care Allowance;
- Disability Living Allowance;
- Child Benefit;
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance;
- Child Tax Credit;
- Working Tax Credit;
- a Social Fund payment;
- State Pension Credit.

The evidence that an applicant is receiving one or more of these benefits should be recorded on the application (under the 'Checks' tab in the HSR database).

If the applicant is a UK national and has always lived in the UK, they will have recourse to public funds. If the applicant is not a UK national or is a UK national who has lived abroad, they should provide a copy of their passport or visa and should be advised to apply for Job Seeker's Allowance or Income Support and the Department for Work and Pensions will determine whether or not they have recourse to public funds and are entitled to benefits. In such cases, the referrer should indicate on the application that this is yet to be determined.

b) Social Housing.

Having recourse to public funds does not automatically mean that an applicant is eligible for assistance under Part 6 and Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 and, in some cases, applicants may be excluded from the Housing Support Register and the Bristol Housing Register (HomeChoiceBristol).

Eligibility for social housing is a complex area and has been the subject of much case law. Careful consideration should be given to the following groups :

- British Nationals returning from abroad,
- EEA Nationals, and
- Persons who may be subject to Immigration Control.

As stated earlier, if a referrer or a HSR provider has doubts about a person having recourse to public funds or eligibility for Social Housing through the HSR or Home Choice Bristol they can seek advice from the Single Point of Access or BCC Housing Advice Team.

NOTE TO SERVICE PROVIDERS - RECOURSE TO PUBLIC FUNDS.

Services Providers assessing a referral from the HSR are advised to make their own checks as to a clients' eligibility as they will bear the financial burden of accepting an applicant who proves not to be eligible. Circumstances can change and the fact a person is on the HSR should not be taken as a guarantee of eligibility to Housing Benefit, other benefits or Social Housing.

4. Local Connection.

It is important that applicants have a clear local connection with Bristol. In applying this criteria to the HSR the City Council has adopted the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities issued by the Government Department for Communities and Local Government.

Generally a local connection with Bristol arises if any of the following apply :-

a) Residence.

The applicant (or a member of their household) is normally resident in Bristol. An indication of this would be that they have lived in Bristol for 6 months in the previous 12 months, or 3 years during the past 5 years.

The applicant will need to confirm their previous addresses, which should be within the City boundary (as opposed to the Greater Bristol area) in order to qualify.

Please note that time spent in hospital, prison, and institutions does not count towards time as a local connection. This will include stays in residential treatment (substance misuse) establishments.

Similarly time spent in Bristol while receiving services purchased by another local authority will not count as time towards a local connection. Examples would be an applicant receiving an addiction treatment service, or a young person (Children Act duty), where the accommodation and/or service has been purchased by another local authority.

b) Employment.

The applicant has present permanent employment in the area. Employment needs to be on a permanent basis and seasonal/casual work does not qualify the applicant.

c) Family connection.

The applicant has family connections in the area. This will normally be a close family connection ie sister, brother, mother father – and the family member should have been resident in the area for a period of at least 5 years. In addition the applicant must have a wish to live near the family member and should have a close ongoing relationship.

d) Special circumstances.

In special circumstances a local connection may accept a local connection eg where the applicant has a need to be near specialist services only available in Bristol.

If a Referrer feels that an applicant's situation warrants consideration under 'special circumstances' they should refer the applicant to the BCC Housing Advice Team (HAT) at Amelia Court for consideration. Similarly, if there are any doubts about eligibility under the local connection criteria a referral to HAT using the Common Referral Form process should be made.

5.Summary.

To summarise, a person being referred to the HSR must be homeless, or threatened with homelessness, and have demonstrable support needs (vulnerability) for which it is essential they receive housing related support in order to sustain or obtain housing.

They must also have a proven local connection with the Bristol City area and evidence of recourse to public funds.

6. Exceptions – SP Funded Drugs and Alcohol Services.

The criteria for eligibility to SP funded Drugs and Alcohol services differ from the above in two areas ;

1) The need to be homeless or potentially homeless :

In the case of D&A referrals clients do not necessarily have to be homeless or potentially homeless, but the referrer must show that when a client is currently accommodated the referral to accommodation based drugs and alcohol services is essential to achieve a successful outcome to their treatment programme.

In these cases the referrer should provide information supporting the application.

Care should also be taken to ensure that, where a person is leaving their own accommodation to take up short-term accommodation based service, a suitable move on option is available for them on completion of their treatment programme as social housing may not be available under the Priority Move on Scheme.

2) Local connection :

The local connection criteria is the same as in Section 4 of this document with the exceptions being:

- a) where a person has been undergoing a residential treatment programme purchased by Safer Bristol Substance Misuse Team outside Bristol and the client needs to continue their treatment by accessing a Bristol based service.
- b) where a person with a local connection to Bristol has been serving a sentence in HMP outside Bristol and wishes to access or continue D&A treatment on their release.

Please note - Anyone making a referral to D&A services should read this section in conjunction with the HSR Drugs and Alcohol Services Directory which provides broader advice and policy guidance on making D&A referrals on the Housing Support Register.