

GLOUCESTERSHIRE SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCY PROTOCOL (SWEP) 2019-20

POLICY AND PROCEDURE – Public version

Introduction

Gloucestershire Local Authorities have developed a humanitarian response to prevent deaths on the county's streets due to extreme cold weather, and to ensure that every effort is made to engage with individuals during this period to facilitate longer term solutions. This is known as the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol ("SWEP").

It should be noted that SWEP is not a statutory duty.

SWEP operates in the period between 1st November 2019 and 31st March 2020, only when there is extreme weather (as defined below). The street homeless assertive outreach team (P3) is contractually obliged to provide a service to support the work carried out by and on behalf of the six district Local Authorities during SWEP.

Definition of extreme Weather

For the purposes of this protocol, extreme weather is identified as:

"A temperature forecast of 0°C or lower for three or more consecutive nights, or of -3°C or lower for one night only.

In addition, the definition is extended also to include night(s) of any Met Office weather warning (yellow, amber or red) relating to other types of severe weather which could have a detrimental effect on rough sleepers – i.e. snow, ice, high winds & flooding (but not fog)."*

** For the purpose of this policy 'night' is defined as 10pm to 8am.*

Temperature-related implementation applies when the threshold is met at any point in the potential period. When temperatures are borderline, it is important that hourly forecasts are checked as well as summary date forecasts.

Monitoring Weather Conditions

For temperature thresholds, The Met Office website (<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk>) should be proactively monitored in this winter period by the Local Authorities to determine whether or not SWEP should be called for the following day.

Weather warnings relating to snow/ice/wind/flooding can be proactively checked at <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/warnings> Alternatively, Local Authority callers can sign up for alerts at <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/about-us/guide-to-emails> - although these can set at regional level only, the alerts contain specific information about which authority areas are affected.

Calling and Ending SWEP

If either element of the above definition is identified by the district council lead, they should then call SWEP for that district. The P3 Outreach team should be involved in the decision-making process with the local authority before they send an email to all relevant organisations.

SWEP is to be called the day before the definition applies and provision is implemented – this gives the Outreach team more time to find all potential rough sleepers, and provides time to mobilise.

SWEP will be implemented on the first day that this definition applies, having been called the day before. SWEP is called for the number of days that this definition applies (e.g. 4 continuous nights of 0°C or lower forecast, or one/two nights of sub -3°C, or one night of yellow weather warning high wind, etc.

When the weather improves, and temperatures are forecast to rise above zero degrees, then agencies and the individuals accommodated under the protocol will be informed by each local authority that the SWEP provision will cease. See Process below.

Local Authorities wishing to run SWEP outside of the County Protocol

If Local Authorities decide to call SWEP outside of the County protocol – e.g. for one night of cold weather above the definition thresholds – Local Authorities will have to bear any costs internally. Each Local Authority has the power to call a SWEP-type approach outside of the protocol; in these cases, the County Homelessness Coordinator (CHC) will confirm to the Local Authority that the local authority will bear associated costs, rather than the countywide SWEP budget.

Note: The MHCLG have asked all local authorities to inform them when:

- SWEP has been triggered
- There been any serious or critical incidents involving rough sleepers
- There been any significant new issues relating to rough sleeping, such as a new encampment being established

Updates are to be sent to roughsleepinginitiative@communities.gov.uk.

The SWEP lead for each authority (see page: 10) will be responsible for informing the MHCLG as early as possible on the day in question. Please copy the County Homelessness Coordinator into the correspondence.

Who does SWEP apply to?

SWEP applies to everyone who will be without shelter and without the financial means or capacity to secure accommodation during the period of extreme weather (including rough sleepers without recourse to public funds). It is not restricted to those groups of people identified as being 'Eligible' or in 'Priority Need' under homelessness legislation.

SWEP does not apply to those who have accommodation available to them, but who choose not to live in it. It is for those who would genuinely be sleeping rough were

SWEP not in place. For the purposes of this policy, 'available accommodation' must be safe for the individuals to live in without risk of harm to themselves or others as far as reasonably possible.

Accommodation

Accommodation provided during the SWEP period will include a variety of options most suitable for individuals' needs. This will include Winter Crash Pads, Sit-up provision, and hotels or bed & breakfast accommodation as a last resort.

1. SWEP Crashpads

SWEP crashpads are the default option for SWEP accommodation. They will be in suitable communal rooms in supported accommodation provision, or in other faith or VCS spaces. These rooms will be designated for SWEP clients only during the SWEP period, will accommodate a maximum of 15 individuals of the same gender (unless clear segregation is possible), and will be staffed by at least 1 trained member of staff who is enhanced DBS cleared. Individuals will be provided with a bed / camp-bed / mat and clean bedding.

Individuals must be referred to the crashpads; referrals are made by council housing options teams, the Emergency Duty Team (Orbis), and the Outreach team only (see Process, below).

2. Sit-Up Accommodation

Sit-up accommodation is the option for individuals who are assessed by the assertive Outreach team as unlikely or unable to access crashpads because of particular issues or circumstances. These might include:

- People with PTSD or other mental health problems which would make sharing a room particularly difficult.
- Entrenched rough sleepers with complex needs: with a fear of buildings with a letter box, for example, or a building run by a particular provider
- People who have been barred from all accommodation providers who offer crashpads

This accommodation is currently limited to P3 assessment centres in Gloucester and Cheltenham.

3. Bed and breakfast / hotels

Bed and breakfast accommodation may only be used in the last resort, once crashpad and sit-up options are exhausted, although B&B's which accept homeless clients are increasingly rare.

PROCEDURE

1. Calling SWEP

- a. Each local authority will monitor the weather conditions for their area using the Met Office weather forecast <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk> in relation to the definition above, and make a decision on whether the severe cold weather arrangements apply; and, if outside of the protocol, whether they have the resources to implement it directly themselves. The LA should liaise with the P3 Outreach team when making their decision to call SWEP as they will be aware of 'on-street' conditions that may affect the decision.
- b. Each local authority should call SWEP as early as possible on the working day BEFORE the severe weather definition applies*; by 4pm at the very latest. This is to allow the Outreach team and accommodation providers time to mobilise increased staffing / other resources, and for Outreach to locate individuals in the affected areas and begin referrals.
** If the weather forecast changes significantly overnight then SWEP may need to be called on the morning the weather definition applies; this should not be standard procedure and is for exceptional circumstances only.*
- c. Each local authority lead should ensure that there is a deputy ready to call SWEP by the deadline above, in the event that they are away or unavailable.
- d. When a local authority decides to activate SWEP, each Authority will notify the full list of core contacts (copy from the end of this document), including the timeframe proposed. In addition, each Authority should also include local groups or services that may also have local interest in the activation of SWEP within their notification email.

2. Who can refer into SWEP accommodation

- a. Individuals must be referred into SWEP accommodation – direct access is not permitted. Referrers are limited to:
 - The countywide Outreach team (P3)
 - Local Authority Housing Options / Homelessness teams
 - Emergency Duty Team ('EDT', run by Orbis)

Under no circumstance may individuals be directed or taken to SWEP accommodation without a referral having already been made and accepted. This rule includes the Police, VCS agencies, and referring organisations themselves. This is to ensure that a risk assessment has been done as far as possible, and that the crashpads entry timeframe is adhered to.

Non-referring agencies who interact with people who they believe to be street homeless on the night in question should either direct/take individuals to the nearest local authority homeless team (i.e. at their council office), contact the P3 Outreach team, or direct/take them to the nearest P3 Hub. If it is outside normal working hours, and the Outreach team is not contactable, agencies should contact the Emergency Duty Team by phone. One of these referring agencies will then make the referral.

3. Making SWEP referrals - context

- a. Most referrals will be made by the Outreach team as they will have pre-existing contact with the large majority of potential clients, will know where to find people, and will be able to provide most detailed referral and risk assessment information to crashpad providers.
- b. If individuals present to local authorities, homeless prevention work or assessments will be made in the normal way under the Homeless Reduction Act. If SWEP accommodation is determined to be appropriate and the only available option, the housing options officer will contact the Outreach team to get detailed referral and risk information, if possible. If the Outreach team is not available, or the client is not known to Outreach, the housing options officer will make a referral including as much information as possible.
- c. If individuals present to the out-of-hours Emergency Duty Team by telephone as homeless (either directly or via other agencies such as the police), homeless prevention work or assessments will be made in the normal way. If SWEP accommodation is determined to be appropriate and the only available option, the Orbis officer will contact the Outreach team to get detailed referral and risk information, if possible. If the Outreach team is not available, or the client is not known to Outreach, the Orbis officer will make a referral including as much information as possible.
- d. Whilst the protocol is in place, any person who approaches the District Councils or the Outreach team and is homeless and/or imminently at risk of rough sleeping will need to satisfy these services that they have nowhere to sleep that night. The District Councils and the Outreach team will be expected to make relevant enquires to verify this: e.g. contacting parents, landlords or employers.
- e. Each Local Authority and the Outreach team will implement individual arrangements for the placement of rough sleepers into SWEP accommodation during severe weather. It is the Local Authority's decision on whether a placement is made. Local Authorities and the Outreach team should ensure that applicants are aware of the reasons why they are being placed in temporary accommodation and any requirements that they need to fulfil.

4. Making SWEP referrals - process

- a. Referring agencies (see Section 2, above) have a spreadsheet of available crashpads / sit-ups, detailing all provision by district, any exclusions, whether dogs are accepted, entry/exit times, maximum number of clients, etc.

- b. Referrals are made by a dedicated SWEP referral form, which includes summary information about the client, risks to / from the client, and follow-up actions requested (e.g. to encourage / facilitate the client to access local authority / Outreach / P3 Hub support the following day). Referrals are sent by email to the first appropriate accommodation option on the list. A follow up phone call must then be made to the specified provider to discuss and confirm acceptance. Individuals must not be directed to the accommodation provider until the provider has received the referral form and confirmed acceptance in the follow-up phone call.
- c. Each crashpad / sit-up provider has the right to refuse a referral, based on lack of information, risk, or because of behaviour management issues within the SWEP accommodation, or the wider Accommodation Based Support provision. In this case, the referrer will move to the next provider on the list, or in another district.
- d. In the event that all crashpad accommodation is full, clients can be referred to bed and breakfast emergency accommodation for the SWEP period only. It is the responsibility of each referring organisation to ensure that B&B landlords know the duration of the SWEP placement and that payment will only cover this period of time.

5. Travel to Accommodation

- a. Individuals will generally be expected to make their own travel arrangements to the accommodation provided; however, these costs can be met through the County Homelessness Fund if lack of funds means that someone would have to sleep out during the predicted cold weather.
- b. Up to £50 (per local authority or Outreach) may be invoiced to the county homelessness coordinator, along with other costs, in the usual way (see below).
- c. The Stagecoach Travel-Tokens are no longer in use. Ideally the referrer will purchase travel arrangements (bus tickets, train tickets, taxi, etc.) to avoid misuse of funds, but where this is not possible cash can be given to the rough sleeper to purchase themselves. If cash is given this must be recorded and receipt signed by the rough sleeper.

6. Managing Risk

- a. The relaxed eligibility criteria of SWEP can increase risk to staff and other individuals: large shared spaces, unfamiliar facilities, clients who are banned from services, clients about whom little information is known, or individuals that usually have difficulty with engaging can all present risks. Placing rough sleepers requires a duty of care to staff, partners, and individuals already placed in accommodation.
- b. To minimise risk, each service referring clients into SWEP crashpads or sit-ups must complete the risk assessment on the referral form with as much information as possible; or state 'not known'. Risk assessments include

sections on risk to and from others, and to self; including about violence, harm to self or others, drug and alcohol use, housing history and history with other services. Each accommodation provider must assess risk based on these referrals and any other sources of information; and should refuse clients if there are unacceptable levels of risk.

- c. Prior to the SWEP period, accommodation providers and the Outreach team will share information about any clients who are of such risk that it is not appropriate to place either in any crashpad service at all, a particular service, or with another specific individual. This information will be shared and deleted appropriately during SWEP when placements are made, complying with the General Data Protection Regulation.
- d. Individual risk assessments should be carried out on clients who present to local authorities during working hours, either by accessing information held on databases, previous START forms or by liaising with the Outreach team or other organisations involved, as well as speaking to the client. The risk assessment includes information about violence, harm to self or others, drug and alcohol use, and people with whom it is not safe to be placed.
- e. The small number of unknown individuals presenting out of hours cannot be subject to the same level of risk assessment. The Orbis team should email the referral and make a follow up phone call to crashpads as the normal default option, but make clear to the provider that they have not been able to do a risk assessment. If the crashpad / sit-up provider already knows the client, or is able to liaise with the outreach team or other organisations to get more information, they might choose then to accept the referral. If nothing can be known about the client, they should be placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation overnight by the Emergency Duty Team and asked to attend the relevant local authority office the following day. At this point the risk assessment will be carried out, with input from the Outreach team if possible, and then referred to crashpad accommodation for the next night if SWEP is still in place.

As EDT/Orbis are unable to record SWEP provision separately from normal out of hours placements, each local authority housing options lead should record these placements and send to the outreach team and county homelessness coordinator the following day.

- f. If, when a risk assessment is done, an individual is judged to be too high a risk (to the public or to themselves) to be placed in accommodation available to under the SWEP protocol, or no agency with whom the Council works under the SWEP protocol will take the applicant concerned, then the referring agency should alert the agency most likely to be responsible for them e.g. EDT, Adult social care, the Outreach team, mental health services, Probation, the Police etc.
Summary details of anyone not able to placed at all should be emailed to the outreach team and county homelessness coordinator:

Any individual who refuses accommodation when SWEP is called should be reported to Adult social care and the local police force so welfare checks, and referrals can be undertaken as needed.

7. Reconnection

The Reconnection Policy should be applied if relevant to the Service User accessing SWEP.

8. SWEP Aftercare

Whilst saving lives in extreme temperatures is the primary objective of SWEP, the second objective is to facilitate access into the homelessness pathway and associated support services for clients. It is therefore critical that referral forms are cc-ed to the P3 street outreach team so that they can make contact with each individual. This applies to existing Outreach clients as much as previously unknown individuals.

- a. All referral forms should be cc-ed to the Outreach team, County Homelessness Coordinator, and deputy (email addresses on form)
- b. Providers are encouraged to use the Homeless Link recommended monitoring tool to record who has stayed in their provision and provide copies of this to the outreach team. Outreach will amalgamate this information to create a combined County SWEP monitoring spreadsheet. This information will enable outreach to maintain contact with rough sleepers during the Winter and make recommendations for future provision.
- c. Outreach workers will attend crashpads in the evenings SWEP has been called, where possible, to maximize chances of engaging with every individual attending, to agree follow-up actions (e.g. to be referred to supported housing, council homeless teams, other support agencies etc. as appropriate); and to record monitoring information of clients staying.

10. The County Homelessness Coordinator is cc-ed into all referrals, and liaises with the Outreach team to monitor placement data and aftercare outcomes. The CHC will report this data to the County Homelessness Implementation Group, and use this information for future reviews.