

**GLOUCESTERSHIRE SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCY  
PROTOCOL (SWEP) - POLICY AND PROCEDURE  
1<sup>st</sup> November 2015 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016**

**SWEP Policy**

**Introduction**

Gloucestershire Local Authorities have developed a humanitarian response to prevent deaths on the County streets due to extreme cold weather and to ensure that every effort is made to engage with individuals during the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP). It should be noted that the SWEP is not a statutory duty. SWEP will operate between 1<sup>st</sup> November 2015 and 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016. St Mungos Broadway is contractually obliged to provide a service to support the work carried out by and on behalf of the six Local Authorities during SWEP.

**Definition of Extreme Weather**

For the purposes of this policy, extreme weather shall be identified as;

*“A temperature forecast of zero degrees or lower for three or more consecutive days.”*

If this forecast is identified by any Local Authority representative then the SWEP shall be activated within that district.

However, where there is an occasional forecast of above zero degrees in a series of sub-zero nights then a common sense approach will be taken by the Local Authority

The Meteorological Office forecast will be used by the Local Authorities to determine whether or not SWEP should be called. Please see below for the link to the Meteorological Office website.

<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk>

The SWEP will be implemented on the first day of the forecast. 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 that the SWEP provision will cease.

**Local Authorities wishing to run SWEP outside of the County Protocol**

If Local Authorities decide to call SWEP outside of the County protocol, i.e. for one night of cold weather or for a one off severe weather event such as flooding, snow (where temperatures do not dip below 0 degrees) or wind etc; Local Authorities will have to bear the costs internally. In addition St Mungos Broadway (the Gloucestershire Assertive Outreach provider) will not be able to provide a similar level of support equal to the support provided during a Countywide SWEP. The County Homelessness Coordinator will decide if the SWEP is operated outside of the County protocol.

### **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 in Priority Need under the Homelessness legislation.

SWEP does not apply to those who may 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 is reasonably possible.

### **Accommodation**

Accommodation provided during the SWEP period will include Winter Crash Pads, Bed and Breakfast accommodation and any other accommodation arranged by St Mungos Broadway (SMB), Districts Housing Advice Teams (H.A.T) or the Emergency Duty Team (EDT).

#### ***Referrals into Winter Crash Pads***

Placements at B&B's and Hotels should ideally be made during office hours only. Crash pads are to be used for any out of hour's placements to ensure clients are not turned away unnecessarily from accommodation. SMB must have regard for any history a service user might have with the crash pad provider before the referral is made. A service level agreement will be in place between the provider and St Mungos Broadway as the only referring body into the winter crash pad scheme during SWEP.

#### ***Travel to Accommodation***

Individuals will generally be expected to make their own travel arrangements to the accommodation provided; however these costs could be met through the County Homelessness Fund if lack of funds meant that someone would have to sleep out during the predicted cold weather. SMB and Local Authorities should seek to use travel tokens as an alternative to cash to prevent misuse of funds.

### **Managing Risk**

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. Each service placing rough sleepers have a duty of care to its staff, partners and individuals already placed in accommodation.

It is anticipated that through the Rough Sleeper Working Group, SMB will hold a list of known Rough Sleepers along with a completed risk assessment completed with the individual and partner agencies. This information will be shared appropriately during SWEP when placements are made, having regard for the Data Protection Act 1998.

Individual risk assessments will be carried out on clients who present to staff during working hours if the individual is not already known to the Outreach Service. Assessments should include asking clients about violence, harm to self or others, drug and alcohol use, housing history and history with other services. Staff will contact other agencies involved if considered relevant.

If someone is not known and no information is known on their background, the local authority will have the final say whether or not that person is placed into SWEP accommodation.

The small number of unknown Individuals presenting out of hours cannot be subject to the same level of risk assessment. They will generally be placed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation overnight by EDT and asked to attend the relevant local authority office the following day. At this point the risk assessment will be carried out. If, when taking out of hours calls, applicants are known by the officer to be of high risk then they will not be placed in B&B but will be referred to an appropriate agency. Eg police, mental health team

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 the Councils under the SWEP protocol or no agency with whom the Council works under the SWEP protocol will take the applicant concerned; then they will be alerted to the agency most likely to be responsible for them e.g. EDT, SMB, mental health services, Probation, the Police etc.

If someone is not placed due to high risk the agency approached with the referral will inform all contacts on the core contacts list

### **SWEP Volunteers**

Volunteers wishing to assist the Outreach Team locate individuals during the SWEP activation period will be trained and managed through St Mungos Broadway volunteer's scheme. Potential volunteers should contact St Mungos Broadway directly.

### **Reconnection**

The Reconnection Policy should be applied if relevant to the Service User accessing SWEP. The Reconnection document is attached as an appendix to this policy and procedure

### **Procedure**

1. 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 whether they have the resources to implement them.
2. It is advised that the local authority decide by 12 noon each working day during the SWEP period, whether or not SWEP will be called. This is to allow SMB time to locate individuals in the affected area and arrange suitable accommodation. If an Authority calls SWEP after 12 noon it should be understood that SMB may not be able to locate all known rough sleepers in time to arrange accommodation for that night.

3. When a Local Authority decides to activate SWEP, each Authority will notify the core contacts (see page 7 of this document) of the activation and the dates to and from it is proposed to operate. The Authority must also look to include local groups or services within the notification email that may have a localised interest in the activation of SWEP.
4. The CHC will contact the Police Control room to notify Gloucestershire Police when SWEP is active in a District alongside the Council's notifying the relevant Police contacts. The Housing Team Leader at Tewkesbury Borough Council will cover Fridays during the CHC's non-working day.
5. EDT should be requested to place any rough sleepers who are referred to them out of hours into temporary accommodation advising service users that have been placed to attend the relevant local authority office on the next working day. EDT will notify the relevant local authority if a placement is made and the local authority in turn will notify the CHC and SMB.
6. Whilst the protocol is in place any person who approaches the District Councils or SMB 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 SMB will be expected to make relevant enquires to verify this e.g. contacting parents, landlords or employers.
7. Each Local Authority and SMB will implement individual arrangements for the placement of rough sleepers into temporary accommodation during severe weather. It is the Local Authority's decision on whether a placement is made. Local Authorities and SMB 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.
8. A referral to SMB must also be made by the relevant Local Authority making the accommodation placement. The Local Authority must advise SMB of the placement and request contact with the rough sleeper, for ongoing support. The Outreach team will work with service users that have been referred to try and prevent repeat placements under SWEP. Where SMB has made a placement they will notify the Local Authority where the person placed has a local connection, who they have placed and where.
9. Each Local Authority will need to decide whether they will place an applicant again if they do not take up an earlier offer of accommodation, or if the temporary accommodation is damaged in an earlier placement.
- 10.** It is the responsibility of each Local Authority/SMB to ensure that temporary accommodation landlords know the length of time of the cold weather placement and that payment will only cover this period of time.

11. If SWEP is active for 10 days or more it is anticipated by SMB that most rough sleepers will be known to St Mungos Broadway and will have an 'exit from the streets' plan in place.

12. SWEP Aftercare.

SMB will receive an email notification from Local Authorities when a SWEP placement is made by them and checked against SMB's known client records. If the client is unknown to the Outreach service SMB will carry out an assessment within 24hrs of the placement being made.

In November 2015 a list of name will be drawn up by SMB in partnership with other agencies to ensure that all known rough sleepers are located when SWEP is called.

**ENDS**