

Swale Borough Council

**Severe Weather Emergency Protocol
(SWEPP) and Provision for Rough
Sleepers**

Guidance and Procedure

2019

Introduction

There is a humanitarian obligation on all local authorities to do all they can to prevent deaths on the streets caused by severe weather, with support provided by partner agencies and the public. This is endorsed by the national Severe Weather Emergency Protocol for Rough Sleepers which is guidance published by Homeless link and fully supported by government:

<https://www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/SWEP%20and%20Winter%20Provision%20guidance%202018.pdf>

Swale Borough Council aims to ensure that rough sleepers are protected and provided for during times of adverse weather including:

- Extreme cold periods, when conditions can increase harm and threaten life
- High winds, when there is increased risk of harm from falling objects and debris
- Heavy or prolonged rain, that may impose risk from flooding and landslides
- Heatwaves that can lead to dehydration, sunburn and sunstroke
- Unsafe shelter sought out by rough sleepers for example industrial bins or derelict buildings

The Government requires all local housing authorities to have a common sense approach and flexible arrangements in place during adverse weather to prevent harm and death and to provide emergency accommodation and access to support services.

Annual Rough Sleepers Count or Estimate

There is a requirement for all Local Authorities to undertake an annual rough sleeper count or estimate and record how many people were bedding down on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments on a single chosen night at the start of the winter season.

This can be undertaken as either an actual count or an evidence-based assessment in partnership with local organisations. The final decision on the rough sleeper snapshot figure is made by the local authority, taking account of all the evidence presented and is reported back to the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

Traditionally Swale has conducted an estimate annually which is permitted in areas where the number of people sleeping rough is consistently low, and there is established partnership working in place to monitor rough sleepers regularly and throughout the year.

Identifying need

The rough sleeper count is a valuable tool to assist with planning for SWEP, but a caveat should be implemented for unexpected demand. Throughout the SWEP period intelligence should continue to be shared amongst partners to understand changing numbers, areas where rough sleepers are known to be and what support needs are likely to present. The November 2018 count demonstrated that rough sleepers are living across the borough with 19 in Sittingbourne, 8 in Sheppey and 5 in Faversham. Three were female, and the remaining 29 were male. This is snapshot

data only on that one single night, and is therefore subject to change due to the transient nature of rough sleeping.

Procedure

This protocol sets out the arrangements that Swale Borough Council will put in place to ensure that people sleeping rough in our Borough during periods of adverse weather are not at risk of death or serious illness, and that every opportunity will be given to enable each individual to access emergency accommodation.

Activation of SWEP	<p>During periods of adverse weather the Housing Options Manager will monitor the conditions throughout the day using the Meteorological Office website www.metoffice.gov.uk</p> <p>When the Housing Options Manager receives a 'Met Office Advisor - SE England' email from the Resilience Team (Swale BC) detailing an amber or red severe weather warning for high winds, extreme heat, snow/ice, rain and floods the effected locations will be reviewed and a decision made on whether to activate SWEP.</p> <p>When the Met Office temperature is set at zero degrees Celsius or below SWEP will be activated.</p> <p>A flexible approach will be applied so that 'feels like' temperatures and all weather conditions are taken into account.</p>
Communications	<p>The Housing Options Manager will email the Senior Housing Options Team Officer of the decision to activate SWEP. This will be followed up by a telephone call to ensure SWEP is put in place.</p> <p>The Senior Housing Options Officer will notify by email the Housing Options Team, Environmental services team, communications team, Out of Hours Service, CSU team, Porchlight and all other local partners advising that emergency accommodation will be made available during the designated cold period. Instructions will be provided (as per below) to each agency, team and individual rough sleeper on how to contact the Council or the out of hour's service to arrange emergency accommodation.</p> <p>During Office Hours rough sleepers can self-refer and outside agencies can refer individuals to the Housing Options Service housingoptions@swale.gov.uk / 01795 417485 and an emergency appointment will be confirmed at the Sittingbourne Office, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT.</p>

	<p>When the offices are shut, the Out of Hours procedure will be applied and contact should be made on 01634 304400.</p>
Who can access SWEP?	<p>Anyone who is rough sleeping can access emergency accommodation through SWEP. This operates outside of the usual eligibility and entitlement frameworks that govern access to housing.</p> <p>The Housing Options Officer or Out of Hours Team must be satisfied that the individual is sleeping rough. In the event of any dispute the Senior Housing Options Officer or the Housing Options Manager will make a final decision as to whether emergency accommodation will be offered.</p>
Refusing SWEP Assistance	<p>Some rough sleepers may choose not to accept an offer of emergency accommodation during periods of severe weather, and may not be able to agree to certain terms and conditions, particularly around drugs and alcohol use. A personal housing plan will be offered and where appropriate a referral made to Porchlight for outreach support, along with any other appropriate referrals to drug, alcohol, health, well-being and mental health services. Housing Options Officers will also consider whether a safeguarding referral should be made.</p>
Emergency accommodation	<p>When a rough sleeper meets the above criteria, they will be offered emergency accommodation for the duration of the severe weather, e.g. until the weather improves.</p> <p>During office hours, accommodation will be arranged by Swale's Housing Options Team. Outside of office hours, the officers covering the Out of Hours Service will be contacted so that they can arrange an appropriate placement.</p> <p>Emergency accommodation provided under the terms of this protocol will be allocated in accordance with what is available on the day and the needs of the individual requiring accommodation. (The provision of a night shelter is currently being explored).</p> <p>The accommodation provider will be contacted before midday on each subsequent day after a booking has been made to confirm whether or not the accommodation is required on an ongoing basis.</p>
Risk Assessment	<p>A full risk assessment will be carried out prior to the placement or on the next working day. This information will be held on the Personal Housing Plan on the Locata database system. The risk assessment will help to identify the most appropriate accommodation. Where exceptionally high risks that cannot be managed safely are identified, every step to secure suitable accommodation will be made but accommodation providers may refuse to accept the</p>

	individual. In these cases appropriate referrals will be made to Safeguarding and other agencies such as Probation and the Police.
Support services	Outreach support will be provided by Porchlight homeless charity, and a homelessness prevention plan will be managed by a designated Housing Options Officer at the Council.
De-activation of SWEP	The weather forecast will be monitored daily by the Housing Options Manager or the Senior Housing Options Manager, and when the weather improves and there are no other adverse weather conditions prevailing, the emergency accommodation will be withdrawn. The homelessness relief duty will remain for 56 days albeit without the provision of accommodation.
Extended Provision	<p>At the end of a SWEP period, the individual's Personal Housing Plan will remain active for 56 days and work will continue in partnership with other agencies to deal with any longer term homelessness and support needs.</p> <p>Where applicable those meeting the statutory threshold for homelessness will continue to be provided with emergency accommodation, although this may be a different placement to that provided under SWEP.</p>
Recording SWEP cases	In accordance with all Housing Option and Homeless applications, each rough sleeper engaged with the SWEP service will have an individual Personal Housing Plan created on the Locata database system which will include demographic data and the length of stay and cost of the emergency accommodation. Where available, move-on details will also be recorded.