

SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCY PROTOCOL (SWEP)

Sevenoaks District Council's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol for Rough Sleepers

1. Background

Over several years the government has committed to dealing with Rough Sleeping and encourages all Council's to have Severe Weather Emergency Procedures (SWEP) in place. The SWEP is a process that is put in place to ensure that people sleeping rough are not at risk of harm or, in the worst case, of dying during periods of cold and severe weather. However it also gives services the opportunity to engage with hard to reach individuals who have previously refused assistance so that every effort can be made to prevent them from returning to a rough sleeping lifestyle.

Although rough sleeper numbers are consistently low in Sevenoaks District, this Council recognises the need to have a SWEP in place to safeguard the wellbeing of those identified as sleeping rough during a period of severe weather. It is recognised that some Rough Sleepers do not sleep rough every night because they will alternate between sleeping rough and staying with friends whenever possible.

2. Purpose of the Protocol

This protocol sets out the arrangements that Sevenoaks District Council will put in place to ensure that people are not at risk of ill health or death on the streets within Sevenoaks District during extreme cold and severe weather. This protocol explains the steps that this Council will take to ensure actions are taken during periods of severe weather to offer and provide overnight accommodation to anyone rough sleeping in the district and believed to be at risk due to these conditions.

During periods of cold or severe weather, Sevenoaks District Council will monitor overnight weather predictions with the Met Office, to work with partners to activate the SWEP protocol to ensure overnight shelter is offered and provided to any Rough Sleepers identified during this time.

Whether shelter is provided for an individual, as well as the type and location of the accommodation, is at the discretion of the Housing Advice Team.

3. Protocol Triggers

The Protocol will be implemented by Sevenoaks District Council when the Met Office forecasts predict for the next three consecutive nights or more, of temperatures at a minimum of zero degrees Celsius or lower. SWEP will be triggered prior to the first night of these predictions to provide immediate overnight accommodation and not limited solely to consecutive three nights.

4. Eligibility for assistance

The SWEP operates outside usual eligibility that are found within the homeless legislation and will be applied to all those who may otherwise be excluded from

services including people who in ordinary circumstances the Local Authority would not have a duty to accommodate, for the period of severe weather.

When assessing rough sleepers as part of the SWEP procedures, where the individual would not normally be eligible under the housing and homelessness legislation, the following principles should be applied by the Housing Advice Team:

- The SWEP Protocol only applies to individuals over 18 years olds. Rough Sleepers who are identified as 16 or 17 years old must be referred immediately to Kent Social Services and a safeguarding referral made into this Council's Safeguarding Policy.
- Rough Sleepers who do not have a local connection to Sevenoaks District will not be excluded from SWEP. However all efforts will be made to reconnect them to the Local Authority that they do have a local connection with. Prior to reconnecting a rough sleeper back to their Local Authority, that Local Authority will be contacted to ensure that they have appropriate SWEP arrangements in place to accommodate the rough sleeper.
- All rough sleepers will be offered overnight accommodation for the duration of the SWEP.
- If the person has somewhere to stay one or two nights but not the other nights they should contact the Housing Advice Team each day they will be street homeless to check whether the 'SWEP' is in place for that night.
- There is no minimum or maximum number of nights a Rough Sleeper can be provided with shelter. The weather forecast will be checked daily and once the minimum temperature predicted has risen above zero degrees Celsius, accommodation will no longer be provided for the Rough Sleeper and they will be notified of this before midday on the day they are expected to leave the shelter.
- The Housing Advice Team Leader (or relevant Housing Officer delegated to cover in their absence) will have the discretion to continue providing accommodation if the predicted minimum temperature is to rise above zero degrees Celsius for one or more nights.
- It is acknowledged that some Rough Sleepers may refuse the SWEP accommodation and support offered. Sevenoaks District Council is alert to the fact that cold weather increases the risk of death or serious illness and so individuals will be provided with information about the risks of cold weather on their health. If someone continues to refuse help in these circumstances it may be grounds for an officer to trigger the assistance of mental health services to ensure that the rough sleeper has the capacity to make this decision. A referral to Kent Social Service to make a safeguarding referral if the customer is identified as being vulnerable. Sevenoaks District Council's Safeguarding Policy should be implemented if a referral is made.

- All customers being accommodated under the SWEP will be offered advice and assistance to deal with their longer term issue of homelessness. The Housing Officer will undertake a Homeless Application as required under the homeless legislation.

5. Procedure

- During periods of cold or severe weather, Sevenoaks District Council will monitor overnight weather predictions with the Met Office, to work with partners to activate the SWEP protocol to ensure overnight shelter is offered and provided to any Rough Sleepers identified during these periods of severe weather. Sevenoaks District Council will ensure the following organisations are contacted when the protocol is triggered:
 - Sevenoaks District LSP Partners
 - CCTV control room
 - KCC Community Wardens
 - Police
 - Town and Parish Councils
 - SDC Out of hours service
- Rough Sleepers may present in person to the Housing Advice Team at Sevenoaks District Council offices, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks. A partner, resident or town/parish council can also refer someone to the Housing Advice Team by contacting 01732 227000
- Rough sleepers who are identified outside of the normal working hours for the Housing Advice Team (9am - 5pm Monday to Friday) should be referred to the Out of Hours Service on 01732 227000. Housing Advice Officers may need to make use of Bed and Breakfast placements during unsociable hours and then look for a more appropriate placement the next working day.
- A Housing Advice Officer will collate the details and carry out a full assessment to verify rough sleeping and the need for emergency overnight accommodation as part of the SWEP.
- All verified rough sleepers will be offered overnight accommodation for the duration of the SWEP. Where ever possible the Housing Advice Team will provide accommodation for the individual as near to the district as possible. However, due to the very limited accommodation available it is possible that most placements will be out of the area. Hostel availability as part of the AMAT will be considered outside the district if appropriate and necessary.
- The weather forecast will be checked daily and once the minimum temperature predicted has risen above zero degrees Celsius, shelter will no longer be provided for the Rough Sleeper and they will be notified of this before midday on the day they are expected to leave the shelter. The Housing Advice Team Leader (or such officer delegated to cover in her absence) will have the discretion to continue providing shelter if the predicted minimum temperature is to rise above zero degrees Celsius for one or more nights.

- All customers being accommodated under the SWEP will be offered advice and assistance to deal with their longer term issue of homelessness. The Housing Officer will undertake a Homeless Application as required under the homeless legislation. The Housing Officer will refer the individual to the HERO service for further support and advice to minimise the requirement for further rough sleeping.
- The Housing Advice Officer will record the following information on the SWEP Log throughout the period of severe weather:
 - Number of nights SWEP initiated
 - Number of Rough Sleepers accessing the SWEP provision and their details as detailed below:
 - Name & Date of Birth of client
 - Gender
 - Ethnicity
 - Immigration Status
 - Sexuality
 - Last settled accommodation and core reason for homelessness
 - Support Needs including, mental health, physical health, substance misuse issues, criminal history

6. Monitoring and Review

The SWEP Log data will be reviewed by the Head of Housing and Health and the Housing Advice Team Leader at the end of the SWEP period. The data will be used to review the SWEP Protocol annually and inform the West Kent Homelessness Strategy.

Reviewed: 29 November 2016

Reviewed by: Hayley Brooks, Head of Housing and Health

Approved by Portfolio Holder Decision: 1 December 2016