

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

Introduction

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 extreme cold and severe weather.

The Government encourages all Council's to have SWEP arrangements in place. It is not a statutory duty. At the very basic level SWEP is in place to prevent harm and ensure that no one dies on the streets during cold and severe weather. However it also gives services the opportunity to engage with individuals who have previously resisted engagement with health, wellbeing and support services.

The purpose of SWEP is to ensure that a place of warmth and safety is available, during severe weather conditions, for those people sleeping rough who are not normally eligible for statutory services. It also includes those people who have a long history of sleeping rough and have refused previous interventions from housing options and support services, or who choose to continue sleeping rough.

SWEP aims to:

- Prevent harm or death amongst anyone sleeping rough during severe weather
- Provide shelter for rough sleepers who under normal circumstances would not be owed a statutory duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, or who would not normally engage with services
- Prevent those accessing SWEP provision from having to return to the streets
- Assist people sleeping rough who use the SWEP provision to access other support services to meet their needs

Who does it cover?

SWEP applies to anyone identified as sleeping rough on the streets during the period that it is in operation. The only conditions that must be met in order for a rough sleeper to qualify for assistance through SWEP are:

- They must be at risk if they continue to sleep rough during the course of the severe weather
- They must have nowhere available to them to sleep indoors during the course of the severe weather (indoors does not include cars, sheds or garages)
- They must agree to assistance
- It is not restricted to those groups of people identified as being in Priority Need under the Homeless Legislation.
- SWEP does not apply to those who may have accommodation available to them, but who chose not to live in it.

To ensure a humanitarian response in severe weather, SWEP operates outside of the usual eligibility and entitlement frameworks that govern access to housing. Therefore, SWEP will target particularly vulnerable individuals on the basis of need and not on-

going housing entitlement. It is applied to people who would otherwise be excluded from services, including those:

- With No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)
- Who have previously been excluded, banned or evicted from accommodation due to their behaviours
- With no local connection
- Without rough sleeper verification who have not previously had contact with outreach services and/or support

For the purposes of this protocol, 'available accommodation' must be safe for the individuals to live in without risk of harm. Whilst every possible attempt will be made to find suitable shelter, in rare incidences where the risk is unmanageable, some people may have to be barred from provision under SWEP

Definition of Extreme Weather

For the purposes of this protocol extreme weather is identified as a temperature forecast of **zero degrees or lower for three consecutive days**. However, when an occasional forecast above zero in a series of subzero nights occurs then a common sense approach will be taken.

The Met Office forecast will be used. This policy 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.

The measurement will be taken from the Met Office. This is the link: <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/>

When is SWEP activated?

The guiding principles are that SWEP arrangements will be in place during any period of severe or extreme weather.

- SWEP arrangements will be in place during any period of severe weather from the beginning of October through to the end of March every year.
- SWEP arrangements are triggered when the night time temperature is predicted to be zero degrees celsius or below for three consecutive nights.
- Consideration will be given to implementing SWEP when exceptionally cold or inclement weather is forecast that falls short of this definition, this could include periods of extreme heat, rain and/or wind.

Who is involved in delivering SWEP

The main organisation is Northumberland County Council; however other organisations will be involved in providing temporary accommodation if available.