

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

Introduction

SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol) is a process that is put in place to ensure that people sleeping rough are not at jeopardy of harm or, in the worst case, of dying during periods of extreme weather conditions. There is no single definition of severe weather – any weather conditions that materially increases the risk of harm to people sleeping rough can be classed as severe. This includes the extreme cold, wind, snow, rain, and heat.

While the Council has an established year-round approach and commitment to ending rough sleeping in its area, there is an extra pressure on the Council in periods of severe weather (including extreme heat) to prevent the loss of life on the streets.

The provision of shelter for people sleeping rough in England during severe weather is not a statutory duty, even when conditions are life threatening. However, there is a humanitarian obligation on local authorities to do all they can to prevent deaths on the streets, and for their partners and the public to support these efforts. Furthermore, it also gives services the opportunity to engage with individuals who have previously resisted engagement with health, wellbeing, and support services.

Purpose of this protocol

The purpose of SWEP is to ensure that a place of 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. **It must be noted that any people known to be sleeping rough in the area will have already been offered advice and assistance and encouraged to engage with the support that is available.**

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 offered by the council (and its partners /support providers)
- Abide by the rules of the SWEP accommodation provider
- Not be too high a risk, where that risk cannot be appropriately managed
- 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 sub-zero 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.

If SWEP is implemented because of a heatwave, emergency SWEP accommodation will not be provided as an automatic response, but anyone sleeping rough will be helped off the streets as quickly as possible in line with the Councils Rough Sleeper Pathway.

For further information relating to heatwaves, please refer to [Hot Weather and Homelessness – Preventing illness and death in summer](#)

Northumberland County Council covers a large geographical area. Although the entire geographical area is likely to be affected by any periods of severe weather in the same way, on some occasions the weather can vary greatly, on these occasions the Council will implement SWEP on a locality area basis as follows:

- North (Berwick, Alnwick)
- South East (Morpeth, Ashington Blyth, Cramlington)
- West (Hexham, Prudhoe, Haydon Bridge and Haltwhistle)

The measurements will be taken from the Met Office and monitored by senior officers of the Homelessness and Housing Options service

<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 includes 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.