

Thurrock Council – Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) 2019/20

Reviewed	Annually (November)
Document owner	Housing Solutions service
Related documents	Essex Resilience Forum (ERF) adverse weather plans

Introduction

Thurrock Council will ensure that vulnerable people are protected during the winter, when certain weather can threaten the safety and well-being of them. The council will carry out prompt action to ensure rough sleepers have access to shelter if it is believed that they are at risk during severe cold weather.

This document sets out the mechanisms by which rough sleepers in Thurrock can access accommodation and support during periods when the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) is activated.

The trigger for SWEP to be activated is when the Met Office forecasts a minimum of three night's temperature, being zero degrees Celsius or below. Local conditions such as wind chill, snow and heavy rainfall will also be considered.

The focus of SWEP arrangements should be on ensuring that there is a humanitarian response to prevent rough sleepers dying from the cold while there is severe weather. It is expected that all rough sleepers, including those who would normally have no recourse to public funds, are provided with emergency accommodation away from the streets.

These arrangements will often be made outside the usual eligibility/ entitlement framework that governs access to housing. Targeting of particular vulnerable individuals should therefore be done on the basis of need and not ongoing housing entitlement – for example, it should not be based on priority need.

If anyone is found sleeping rough, they must be reported via the street link website, to ensure they receive the right outreach support:

www.streetlink.org.uk or phone 0300 500 0914.

Objectives of the SWEP

Objectives are to:

- ensure that no one dies on the streets due to severe weather
- ensure that every effort is made to engage individuals with support services during the winter months
- work with individuals to end their homelessness

Local provisions

Rough sleepers who approach the council or who are found will be offered accommodation. The type of accommodation will depend on availability; this will usually be a hostel or a Bed and Breakfast establishment.

Some entrenched rough sleepers may reject the offer of accommodation through severe weather. In such cases, it is vital for individuals to be given information regarding the level of risk, especially if they are using substances.

If someone continues to refuse help in these circumstances, and there is a serious risk of their health, there will be grounds to trigger referrals to other services, such as mental health assessments or mental capacity assessments. The outreach worker will provide this information and link in with the relevant services as needed. They may also need to refer via the safeguarding process.

Activation and deactivation of the protocol

Certain criteria will trigger the activation of SWEP.

Extreme cold weather will activate SWEP, in particular, if local temperature has been forecast at zero degrees or below for 3 or more consecutive nights.

Other criteria may contribute to possible activation and should not be ignored:

- when consistent just above zero temperatures continue, combined with the impact of rain, snow and high winds
- high winds can lead to an increased risk of injury through uprooted trees, falling walls and blown off roofs and other debris – these could result in serious harm to rough sleepers
- excessive or sudden prolonged rain can lead to flooding and landslides – those sleeping under bridges, on riverbanks and near sand, streams and canals, may be at particular risk, but this can also be extended to other areas, and as well as the risk of drowning, extreme rain can cause health problems from being wet and loss of important documents such as identification
- any other situation as identified through the Thurrock Corporate emergency planning policies such as and the Thurrock Cold Weather Plan

The SWEP protocol should be activated on the first night of the severe weather forecast.

Met Office warnings notifications will be sent through to the Housing Solutions team via the Emergency Planning and Resilience Team. In addition, the Rough Sleeper Project Officer will check Met Office notifications on a daily basis. In absence of this specific officer, the Housing Solutions team managers will take on this role.

If SWEP is activated, they will send an alert to the following by 11am:

- hostel managers
- Housing Solutions team staff
- St Mungo's Broadway Assessment and Reconnection Outreach worker
- Web Team
- Corporate Communications team

The Rough Sleeper Project Officer would link in with the St Mungo's Broadway Assessment and Reconnection Outreach worker to discuss any cases they are aware of so that the right support can be given to known rough sleepers. In addition, they will keep each other up to date with any people attending emergency accommodation.

Once a decision to activate is made, it will stand until the next morning's check, or the next working day check. SWEP will normally be deactivated when a forecast predicts two or more consecutive nights of a temperature over one degree Celsius. However, the consideration should be made to the local environment and the effects of the previous weather conditions.

The following people may authorise the activation or deactivation of the protocol:

- Housing Solutions Team Managers
- Housing Solutions Manager
- Assistant Director of Housing
- Corporate Director of Adults, Housing and Health

Referrals

Referrals can be made by:

- any agency or service – for example, Police, Adult Social Care, Emergency Planning and Resilience Team
- homeless rough sleepers self-referring to the council or via Streetlink
- a member of the public referring someone to the council or via Streetlink

All individuals referred will be expected to complete a Cold Weather Monitoring Form and then placed into temporary accommodation by the temporary accommodation team manager or their replacement.

Any person referred will be assessed by the temporary accommodation team manager or their replacement and then placed if appropriate into an identified accommodation.

SWEP rough sleeper referrals should aim to arrive at the emergency accommodation by 8pm to avoid disruption through the night, although later attendance will be accepted. If placed at the hostel, on arrival, rough sleepers will provide their name and date of birth to ensure they have been referred; anyone not referred appropriately will be reviewed and assessed at the time or at the next appropriate opportunity. Details of the referrals must be provided to the hostel beforehand, so staff at the temporary accommodation are aware of who is attending.

Rough sleepers will not be refused entry whilst an assessment is being or due to be carried out. This may result in the rough sleeper staying the night. If so, they should co-operate with the hostel and provide as much information as possible to speed up the process. Any information received will be forwarded to the outreach worker to ensure they follow up with the rough sleeper and identify next steps.

When activated, applicants placed in a SWEP accommodation will continue for a minimum of a three-day period even if temperatures rise before this point. This allows the outreach workers to work with the individual to find a more lasting solution.

Some rough sleepers may have dogs. If so, our provider, Gemini Kennels, will collect and board dogs on an emergency basis.

Recording, monitoring and sharing data

It is important to gather information about the rough sleeper to allow the council and assisting agencies to plan effectively for future responses. Sharing information between services can save time and resource going forward. The monitoring form should be used in every case when assessing a rough sleeper to gather relevant information and gain consent to share. The FAQ document regarding consent should also be given to everyone assessed.

Supporting documents

- Monitoring Form
- SWEP and Winter Provision Guidance
- Appendix 1 – Flow Chart