

1. Background

Whilst there is no legal requirement for councils to provide shelter for people sleeping rough during severe weather, Lichfield District Council strongly believes there is a humanitarian obligation to provide emergency accommodation to rough sleepers during extreme weather to prevent injury and death.

In addition to the direct risks associated with severe weather, the actions people might take to get out of severe weather can also increase the risk of harm and death. For example, people might find cover in unsafe places such as large bins, which can result in crush injuries or death if the bin is emptied. People might also enter buildings or property without permission, including derelict structures, with associated risks around fire safety and building collapse. People may also increase their substance use as a coping mechanism during bad weather.

Attempting to keep safe and dry in extreme weather increases the risk of death and injury to people without shelter.

The council's [housing, homelessness and rough sleeping strategy 2019 – 2024](#) reinforces the council's commitment to supporting rough sleepers during severe weather.

2. Purpose of the protocol

Severe weather emergency protocols (SWEPs) for rough sleepers set out the arrangements to be made to ensure people are not at risk of dying on the streets by ensuring they have access to accommodation at night during severe weather.

The council's housing team supports rough sleepers into accommodation when the severe weather emergency protocol (SWEPE) is active, based on reports of rough sleepers made to the council.

The accommodation providers vary depending on the local context of services and housing supply, and can include B&B, supported accommodation, hotel or hostel accommodation.

3. When we activate the SWEPE

The protocol is activated during severe weather, or when severe weather is predicted, which is defined as:

Cold Extreme cold can cause serious health problems and death for those who are exposed overnight or for long periods of time. Historically, SWEPE provision was triggered when the forecast was zero degrees or below for three days. It is now best practice to take a common-sense approach, where any forecast approaching zero is considered. The impact of rain, snow and wind chill are also considered, and the 'feels like' temperature is checked, along with conditions underfoot (e.g., ice).

Wind High winds can lead to an increased risk of injury through uprooted trees, falling walls, dislodged pieces of roofing and other debris. This is a particular issue for rural areas where people are, for example, sleeping in tents.

Rain Heavy or sudden prolonged rain can lead to flooding and landslides. People sleeping under bridges, on riverbanks, streams or canals may be particularly at risk, but there may be less obvious flood risks, for example drains or gullies. Standing water, puddles and flooding may continue to be a risk after rainfall has stopped. As well as increased risk of drowning, being stuck in the rain and unable to change out of wet clothes/shoes can lead to a range of health problems, including trench-foot. There is also an increased risk of loss or damage to belongings such as identification documents.

Heatwaves Climate change means that we can now expect more instances of dangerous hot weather. People experiencing homelessness face some of the worst health outcomes and in periods of extreme heat, are at higher risk of developing heat-related illnesses. People sleeping rough may find it difficult to source drinking water and sun protection, increasing risks around dehydration, sunburn, and sunstroke. Needs are likely be more urgent during daylight hours, so a different approach to SWEP may be appropriate e.g., free water and sunscreen, cool daytime spaces, and links to healthcare.

4. How we activate the SWEP

Our housing team is responsible for activating the protocol.

The team adopt a common-sense approach and use resources including weather forecasts <http://news.bbc.co.uk/weather/forecast/322/?area=Lichfield> and weather health alerts issued by UKHSA in partnership with the Met Office.

The team check the weather conditions before 12noon every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday to determine whether to activate the protocol, based on current and predicted weather conditions.

With regards to cold, the team will activate the SWEP when the lowest temperature (including predicted) drops to 0 degrees on any one day.

During the working week the team will look two days ahead when considering whether to active the SWEP, whereas on a Friday the team will consider the full weekend (including any bank holidays) as early in the day as possible, so that partners and any known rough sleepers can be contacted with enough working hours' notice.

If the forecast is predicted to dip during the weekend, the team and partners will contact all known rough sleepers to offer emergency accommodation by the Friday, and then any adhoc reports of rough sleepers will be dealt with out of hours on a presentation basis.

6. What we do when the SWEP is activated

Once the SWEP is triggered, the housing team email all relevant voluntary and statutory organisations that may come across rough sleepers. The council's website is also updated: www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/swep

The council's out-of-hours service is also notified that the SWEP has been triggered.

Once activated the housing team review weather forecasts daily.

The SWEP is only active whilst the severe weather conditions continue/are predicted over non-working days. Rough sleepers accommodated under the protocol and all relevant parties are notified as soon as practically possible when the SWEP is deactivated.

7. Eligibility criteria

To be eligible for emergency housing when the SWEP is triggered, a person must be sleeping rough, or at risk of sleeping rough and be willing to accept the assistance offered.

Sleeping rough is defined as: *people sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments) and in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or "bashes")*.

8. Procedure

Subject to the above criteria, any rough sleeper will be offered accommodation for the duration of the severe weather, i.e., whilst the SWEP is active.

The accommodation offered will be based on availability, the individual's needs, and a risk assessment carried out by the housing team. Accommodation could include bed and breakfast, hotel, supported accommodation, hostel accommodation or temporary accommodation. The accommodation offered may not always be in the district.

Outside office hours, referrals are handled by the out-of-hours service, supported by the director on call. The out-of-hours service notifies the housing team on the next working day of any rough sleepers who have been accommodated, so that appropriate wrap-around support can be provided to each individual.

All rough sleepers accommodated under the protocol are referred to appropriate support services, which includes making a homelessness application, so they can be considered for a referral to the homelessness and rough sleeper housing pathway scheme if eligible. They are also encouraged to apply for housing benefit to meet the cost of ongoing accommodation both under the SWEP and any longer-term arrangements.

The protocol is only active whilst the severe weather conditions continue/are predicted over non-working days. Rough sleepers accommodated under the protocol are notified as soon as possible when the SWEP is deactivated.

If a rough sleeper accommodated under the protocol is involved in any incident of anti-social behaviour, or any other behaviour likely to breach the occupancy conditions of the emergency accommodation, provision of the accommodation will be reviewed.

Separate kenneling arrangements will be made for any pets that a rough sleeper may have if they cannot be accommodated in the emergency accommodation with them. Arrangements for this are made by the housing team in conjunction with the environmental health team.

9. Financial implications

All rough sleepers will be required to submit a claim for housing benefit to fund the cost of emergency accommodation provided through the SWEP.

Where this is not possible/timely, the cost for some/all of the emergency accommodation is met through the council's budgets.

Kenneling costs are met by the council.

10. Monitoring and review

Monthly performance indicators are monitored as part of the housing services dataset including:

- The number of rough sleepers housed during severe weather.
- The number of nights for which accommodation is provided.
- The cost of placements.
- The number of rough sleepers supported that have a local connection.
- The number of rough sleepers accommodated who have no recourse to public funds.
- The nationalities of those accommodated.
- What happened to those accommodated after the SWEP is deactivated.

The protocol is reviewed on an annual basis by the council's Housing and Homelessness Manager in conjunction with the Cabinet Member for Housing & Local Plan.

Any questions email housingoptions@lichfielddc.gov.uk

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