

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol SWEP

Policy and Procedure



Introduction

There is a humanitarian obligation on all local authorities to do all they can to prevent deaths on the streets caused by severe weather.

Within its duties as a local authority, Milton Keynes Council aims to ensure that vulnerable people are protected and provided for during the winter cold season, when extreme cold temperatures for extended spells can threaten the safety and wellbeing of some people living in the city.

This policy incorporates the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) for the borough of Milton Keynes. The aim of this policy is to ensure that no one dies on the street due to extreme weather and that every effort is made to engage with individuals during the extreme weather period so they can access appropriate services.

Definition of Extreme Weather

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) advise that SWEP's should be activated by a weather forecast predicting three consecutive nights, or more, of a temperature of zero degrees Celsius or lower. The Met Office will be used to monitor the forecast. This policy will be implemented on the first day of the forecast. When the weather improves the individuals accommodated under the protocol will be informed that the SWEP provision will cease to be available.



Who does SWEP apply to?

SWEP applies to everyone who will be without shelter and without the financial means or capacity to secure accommodation during the period of extreme weather. 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 choose not to live in it. It is for those who would genuinely be sleeping rough were SWEP not in place. For the purposes of this policy 'available accommodation' must be safe for the individuals to live in without risk or harm.

In the event an individual approaches the service who does not have a local connection, they will be reconnected back to their former area of origin where possible.

Accommodation

Accommodation to be provided during the SWEP period will include the Winter Night Shelter (WNS) and temporary hotel accommodation when spaces are not available at the WNS. Where hotel accommodation is used as SWEP provision, it will be used for room only. Individuals will generally be expected to attend an assessment with support workers from the WNS and travel arrangements will be made for them. If temporary accommodation is provided, individuals will generally be expected to make their own travel arrangements to the accommodation provided. However, these costs could be met by Local Welfare provision if lack of funds meant that someone might have to sleep outside.

A Multi-Agency Approach

Milton Keynes Council will be responsible for the SWEP protocol. However a multi-agency approach will work better through allowing all agencies who come into contact with rough sleepers to pool resources, expertise and facilities to meet the needs

of vulnerable people during periods of extreme weather. Hotel accommodation meets the objective of avoiding anyone dying of the cold on the streets. However the wider objective is to provide an enhanced and more co-ordinated service by working with other voluntary agencies that provide support services for single homeless people and rough sleepers.

The extreme cold weather increases the risk of death or serious illness to people who sleep rough. Given this, a refusal to accept accommodation during this time should lead to clear information being provided about the risks of cold weather on their health, especially if they are using substances. If someone continues to refuse help in these circumstances, and this is a serious risk to their own health, there will be grounds to trigger safeguarding concerns to other services.

Managing Risk

The relaxed eligibility criteria of SWEP can increase risk to staff and other individuals: large shared spaces, unfamiliar facilities, customers about whom little information is known or individuals that usually have difficulty with engaging can all present risk.

Milton Keynes Council has a duty of care to its staff, partners and individuals already placed in accommodation such as a hotel. Individual risk assessments, although brief, will be carried out on customers who present to staff during working hours. Assessments should include asking customers about violence, harm to self or others, drug and alcohol use, housing history and history with other services. Staff will contact other agencies involved if considered relevant.

Individuals presenting out of hours cannot be subject to the same level of risk assessment. They will generally be placed in hotel accommodation overnight and asked to attend the office the following day. At this point the risk assessment will be carried out. If, when taking out of hours calls, applicants are known by the officer to be of high

risk then they will not be placed into temporary accommodation but will be referred to an appropriate agency.

If, when a risk assessment is done, an individual is judged to be too high a risk to the public to be placed in accommodation available to the Council under the SWEP protocol or no agency with whom the Council works under the SWEP protocol will take the applicant concerned, then they will be referred to the agency or service most likely to be responsible for them eg mental health, probation, the police etc.

Monitoring and Review

Details of those accessing the SWEP provision will be recorded by the Winter Night Shelter team and Housing Solutions Manager at the end of the severe weather period for analysis (including person details, support needs, risk issues, housing history, reasons for not being in accommodation etc). This should be accompanied with a narrative report highlighting any concerns with the activation of the protocol, what worked well and any lessons to learn to improve the provision in the future.



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