

**Severe Weather Emergency Protocol
(SWEP)
For Rough Sleepers**

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1. Background

- 1.1 It is recognised that there is a rough sleeping presence within the district. One of the Government's commitments under their six part plan 'Vision to End Rough Sleeping: No Second Night Out' (July 2011), is to help people off the streets as no one should have to spend a second night out. Rough sleeping is the most extreme and visible form of homelessness and for many, they do not necessarily qualify under the homelessness legislation as eligible for housing assistance.
- 1.2 The Council is therefore committed to working with partners to link rough sleepers with the services that can help them find a way off the streets and into settled accommodation. But in times of extreme and cold weather, rough sleepers are particularly vulnerable to harm and death and so the Council recognises that it should make provision to prevent this from happening.
- 1.3 This Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) therefore sets out the arrangements that Dartford Borough Council will put into place to ensure that people are not at risk of dying on the streets in Dartford during extreme cold weather.

2. Purpose of the protocol

- 2.1 This protocol will ensure that the Council takes the necessary steps to avoid deaths on the streets by carrying out prompt action to ensure that all known rough sleepers have the opportunity to have access to shelter if it is believed that they are at risk due to sleeping rough during severe cold weather.

3. Trigger for putting the protocol into place

- 3.1 SWEP arrangements are triggered when the night time temperature is predicted to be zero degrees Celsius or below for three consecutive nights.
- 3.2 The weather forecast for Dartford during periods of cold weather will be checked daily on the Meteorological Office website www.metoffice.gov.uk.
- 3.3 As soon as the protocol is triggered, the Council will contact its voluntary and statutory sector partners by email to advise that the SWEP is in place¹, with details of who to contact if they identify any rough sleepers.
- 3.4 The Council's website will be updated immediately to include details of who to contact if the public comes across someone who is sleeping rough during the severe weather.
- 3.5 The Council's out of hours service will also be contacted to advise that the SWEP has been triggered.

¹ Those contacted by the Council will include members of the Council's Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group.

4. Eligibility criteria

- 4.1 The Council will not apply Part VII Housing Act 1996 criteria (as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002) that govern access to housing when deciding whether to assist a person sleeping rough during the period of the SWEP. This means that the individual concerned is not required in this case to demonstrate eligibility for assistance (including whether they have any recourse to public funds), priority need, intentionality or local connection.
- 4.2 The individual concerned must only:
- Be at risk if they continue to sleep rough during the course of the severe weather.
 - Has no where to sleep in doors during the course of the severe weather. (Indoors does not include cars, sheds or garages).
 - Agrees to the assistance offered by the Council.
- 4.3 Many entrenched rough sleepers may be wary of services and less likely to engage. The extreme cold weather increases the risk of death or serious illness to people who sleep rough. Given this, a refusal to accept assistance during this time may be grounds to trigger referrals to other services, such as for mental health assessments.

5. Procedure

- 5.1 If the rough sleeper meets the above criteria they will be offered emergency accommodation for the duration of the severe weather.
- 5.2 Within office hours, the Council will manage the emergency accommodation bookings (contact 01322 343114). Outside of office hours, members of the Council's Homelessness Strategy Implementation Group will be able to contact the out of hours service to place rough sleepers they become aware of into emergency accommodation during the time that the SWEP is in operation. The out of hours service can be contacted on 0845 634 1212.
- 5.3 The accommodation will be confirmed before midday on a day to day basis.
- 5.4 All clients placed into emergency accommodation when the SWEP is in operation will be referred to Porchlight so that a home visit can be arranged or other appropriate services for ongoing support.
- 5.5 The weather forecast will be checked daily and once the minimum temperature is predicted to have risen above zero degrees Celsius, emergency accommodation will no longer be provided.
- 5.6 The rough sleeper will be offered Housing Options and Advice assistance to deal with their longer term issue of homelessness.

- 5.7 Although rare, if any incidents of anti-social behaviour or unacceptable behaviour are shown during the course of the time that emergency accommodation is being provided, the Housing Options and Private Sector Manager will review the assistance being provided to see if there are any alternative ways to prevent rough sleeping during the severe weather whilst at the same time managing the risks.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 The cost of providing emergency accommodation during the SWEP will be covered from existing Council resources.

7. Monitoring and review

- 7.1 The following information will be recorded and used to monitor the extent of rough sleeping in the borough:
- Number and composition of rough sleeper households.
 - Number of nights accommodated for each household.
 - The cost of emergency accommodation per night for each household.
- 7.2 This Protocol will be reviewed by the Housing Options and Private Sector Manager on an annual basis. This will be carried out in consultation with our key stakeholder partner organisations working with rough sleepers.