

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol

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Severe Weather Emergency Protocol

1.1 Introduction

- 1.2 Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) is an emergency response to severe weather conditions to prevent serious harm or risk to life for people sleeping rough. This protocol is activated by local authorities across the UK.
- 1.3 The Council's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) for Rough Sleepers sets out what arrangements it will put in place to minimise serious harm or threat to life to anyone who might be sleeping rough during periods of severe weather, through the provision of emergency shelter and support.
- 1.4 While the Council works continually to support people rough sleeping in the Borough, during periods of severe weather (including snow, rain, cold, winds and heat) there is an extra pressure on the Council in to prevent serious harm or the loss of life on the streets.
- 1.5 The provision of shelter from local authorities is not a statutory duty unless a person is considered homeless and in priority need for assistance, even during cold or severe weather when the conditions may be life threatening. However, there is a widely recognised humanitarian obligation on local authorities to do all they can to prevent deaths and serious harm on the streets, and for their partners and the public to support these efforts.
- 1.6 The objectives of this Protocol are to:
- Ensure that no one dies on the streets due to severe weather conditions.
 - Ensure that every effort is made to engage and support rough sleepers with the relevant services during periods of severe weather.
 - Work with rough sleepers to end their homelessness.

2.1 Severe Weather Definition

- 2.2 No single definition is used to define what severe weather is within this protocol. SWEP should be activated in any instances where weather conditions increase the risk of serious harm or threat to life. These weather conditions includes, rain, snow, ice, cold, winds & heat. It should also include weather warnings that include Rotherham.
- 2.3 **Cold:** extreme cold can cause serious health problems and death for those who are exposed to it overnight or for long periods of time.

- 2.4 **Wind:** high winds can increase risk of injury through trees being uprooted, falling walls, roofing, and debris from buildings or walls that people may be sheltering in or against.
- 2.5 **Rain:** excessive or prolonged rain can lead to flooding, increasing the risk to those sleeping near bodies of water such as rivers, canals, lakes, drains, underbridges, or the sea. Lengthy exposure to extreme rain can result in health problems and the damage or loss of important belongings e.g. ID documents, appointment letters, banking details.
- 2.6 **Heatwaves:** people sleeping rough may find it difficult to access water and sun protection. They might also struggle to find places out of direct sunlight. This increases their risk of dehydration, sun burn and sun stroke.
- 2.7 **Additional risks:** consideration should be given to how people may respond to severe weather and where they take shelter from it. Unsafe shelters such as large-lidded bins, and illegal entry to empty or derelict buildings may be used. Some people may increase their substance use to cope with the bad weather; this in turn can impact on their health, decision making ability, and behaviour towards and interaction with others.

3.1 Activation & Deactivation

- 3.2 SWEP will be activated for cold weather when the 'feels like' temperature is set to fall below 0 degrees Celsius. This decision will be made by either the Homeless Team manager or Homeless Coordinators between 11am and 12pm on the day and will be reviewed daily throughout periods of severe weather. Homeless Coordinators will have MET office notifications set up to receive relevant warnings on cold weather, as well as yellow, amber and red weather warnings. The geographical trigger location for SWEP will be Rotherham Town Centre.
- 3.3 Once the temperature rises, households deemed not to be priority need will be checked out of accommodation that has been provided, however, will receive ongoing support from the Homeless Team to find suitable long-term accommodation if homeless and eligible. Households that are in priority need or verified as being rough sleepers will remain in temporary accommodation beyond SWEP deactivating whilst their homelessness case is investigated, and or housing solutions are considered.

- 3.4 If the 'feels like' temperature rises above 0 over a weekend or bank holiday, the booking will end on the day of temperature change and contact will be made by the Homeless Team the next working day.
- 3.5 SWEP will also be activated during periods of increased hot weather. These weather conditions require a different approach as the risk to individuals rough sleeping comes through the day, typically between 11am and 3pm when temperatures reach their peak. To reduce the impacts on rough sleepers during these periods, additional provision to carry out rough sleeper walks, along with the distribution of water and sunscreen will be triggered once a MET office amber weather alert for hot weather is issued. This will be sustained until the temperature drops. This will be done in line with Government notification on heatwave alerts.
- 3.6 Discretion from the Head of Housing Options or Homeless Team manager can be applied to activating SWEP.

4.1 Eligibility

- 4.2 When offering assistance under SWEP, the eligibility criteria as set out in Part VII of Housing Act 1996 (as amended by Homelessness Act 2002 and Homelessness Reduction Act 2017) will not be applied. Any person, regardless of eligibility, priority need, intentionality or local connection will be provided with assistance if they:
 - Are at risk if they continue to sleep rough during the course of severe weather conditions;
 - Have nowhere to sleep indoors or have inadequate shelter (such as vehicles or sheds) during the course of severe weather conditions; and
 - Agree to engage with assistance offered by the Local Authority.
 - If the Council identifies any rough sleepers who are not willing to engage with assistance offered during SWEP and considers the person to be at increased risk of death or serious illness as a result, this could be indicative of a mental health issue and referrals to other services such as Mental Health and Adult Services may be completed.

5.1 Provision / Accommodation type

- 5.2 The Council will predominantly use hotels to facilitate placements for households presenting as roofless during SWEP. The Council has the discretion to work with local faith and community services who may be able to offer appropriate safe shelter where it is felt necessary to meet demand. In some circumstances, accommodation providers who work with the Council will be contacted about availability if a household that is

particularly vulnerable or who is high risk is placed through SWEP. This is to better manage risks, support households appropriately and create a pathway to achieving better long-term outcomes.

6.1 Communication

- 6.2 The Homeless Team Manager will consult the activation of SWEP with the Communications Team ensuring the message is communicated via the Councils social media platforms (see Appendix 2 for draft template). The Homeless Team Manager will also notify Adult Social Care Commissioners, who will share the message with supported accommodation providers. The Communications Team and Commissioners will be notified when SWEP has been deactivated.
- 6.3 Notification that SWEP has been activated will be sent to the Strategic Director of Adults, Housing and Public Health, the Assistant Director of Housing and the Head of Housing Options.
- 6.4 An agreement with Mears regarding households placed into Home Office accommodation exists to prevent placements ending during periods when SWEP is active; this must be confirmed by the Asylum & Migration Coordinator from the Homeless Team to ensure this is still the agreement.

7.1 Process

- 7.2 Once SWEP is activated, households presenting as homeless and at risk of rough sleeping will need to contact the Homeless Team or present to Riverside House. Relevant information will need to be provided to establish reason to believe someone is homeless. Once established, a request for emergency accommodation will be sent. Notification of a household to be placed under SWEP will be sent from the Homeless Team to the Temporary Accommodation and Rough Sleeper teams.
- 7.3 Once temporary accommodation has been agreed, the SWEP Placement Letter outlining the conditions of the placement will be provided and explained by the Homeless Officer assigned the case.
- 7.4 Any out of borough placements require the Temporary Accommodation Team to email the relevant Local Authority with a S208 out of borough placement notification.

- 7.5 Households will be required to check out the following day and represent to Riverside House if placed under SWEP and documents or information relating to their homeless application are outstanding. Households placed under SWEP who have provided all documents and information required and used the placement, will be rebooked the following day if SWEP is still active and won't be required to present to Riverside House.
- 7.6 If accommodation is refused or the household is asked to leave, no further accommodation will be provided. In cases where a household does not show up to a placement, the circumstances around this will be investigated by an officer and assessed on a case-by-case basis.
- 7.7 Single night bookings will be made, even where SWEP is likely to cover a number of consecutive days. This is to mitigate financial loss for placements where a household does not show or is asked to leave due to behaviour. Where possible and safe to do so, SWEP placements will be made at the same accommodation provider to reduce disruption to individuals.

8.1 Assessing Risk and Risk Management

- 8.2 Risks are assessed during the household's homeless assessment. If the household member later approaches for accommodation under SWEP, the homeless officers must update the homeless assessment and add any new risk which have been identified at the time of the approach. The request for temporary accommodation under SWEP will then be sent to the Homeless Coordinators.
- 8.3 Consideration is given to the risks posed by the household, as well as risks posed to them; this relates to households that may be fleeing threats of violence and whether certain areas are deemed unsuitable for them to be accommodated in. The appropriateness of area is also considered where a household may be more vulnerable because of not being able to access support. Consideration will be given to ensure accommodation meets the needs of a household.
- 8.4 Homeless Coordinators will assess the specific reasons for the risk and act accordingly. Managing appropriateness of the placement reduces risk to other homeless households, staff and the general public. This protocol should work in conjunction with the Councils Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy.
- 8.5 A range of factors will be considered but limited to:

- The hotel/bed and breakfast profile, including location, capacity, and any relevant community and geographical information, e.g., neighbouring buildings, local amenities, residential area etc.
- The number of households accommodated by the Council per establishment at one given time (always subject to service need in response to demand).
- The proportion / number of households with multiple, complex needs occupying the establishment at one given time at the time of the assessment.
- The predicted number of placements in the up-and-coming week.
- Identified risks and impacts.

8.6 A collaborative approach with other services and professionals will also help to better support the individual and manage any identified risks.

8.7 Households placed under SWEP moving into temporary accommodation are required to sign an Occupancy Agreement. By signing the Occupancy Agreement, the household is agreeing to the terms included and is made aware of the consequences should they breach any of these terms. This is to protect themselves, staff, other people using the accommodation and reinforces the terms and conditions of the placement.

9.1 Outside of office hours

9.2 Placements made outside of office hours will be picked up by the out of hours service. If the household is placed into temporary accommodation, they will be directed to come to Riverside House the next working day for a full homeless assessment.

10.1 Financial implications

10.2 Funding to cover the costs of SWEP placements comes from the Rough Sleeping Winter Pressures 2024/25 Funding. The accommodation provision is short-term for those deemed not to be in priority need, in priority need and intentionally homeless and accommodation duty has ended, or priority need and accommodation duty has ended, the hotel accommodation is charged on a nightly basis.

11.1 Monitoring

11.2 The Council will record details of all placements under SWEP and rough sleeper outside of SWEP. This enables the Rough Sleeper coordinator

to monitor rough sleeping in the borough and plan in advance. The following information may be collected for these purposes:

- Name
- Contact details
- Demographic & Equalities data (gender, date of birth, ethnicity, nationality)
- History of rough sleeping
- Reason for homelessness
- Dates of SWEP placement
- Total cost of placement
- Outcome following SWEP

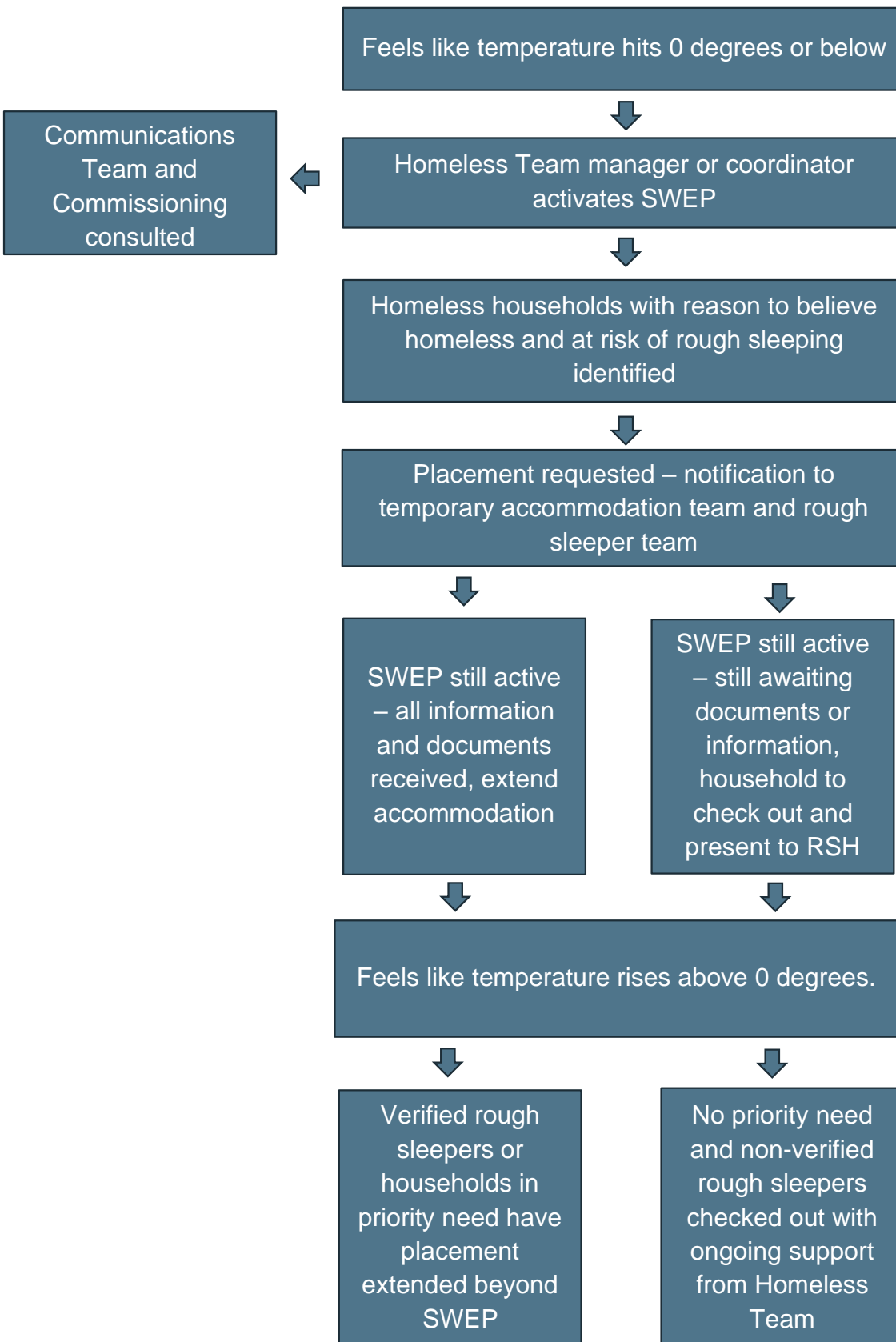
12.1 Review

12.2 The Council will review SWEP annually, this should be in advance of the cold weather periods to assist with planning and to ensure that accommodation provision is suitable and that the best approach is adopted to manage rough sleeping during severe weather.

12.3 Feedback from people with lived experience will be used to help inform the review and identify any improvements.

12.4 An annual report will be presented to the Senior Management Team by the Rough Sleeper Initiative co-ordinator, with oversight from the Furnished Homes and Temporary Accommodation manager, documenting number of placements, cost and whether a change in provision or delivery is required.

Appendix 1 – SWEP activation flowchart



Appendix 2 – SWEP Communications Template

With (insert weather condition) forecasted, we have triggered our Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP), providing emergency shelter to anyone who is identified as sleeping rough to help them stay safe.

If you're concerned about someone sleeping rough in our borough, you can report them to us by phoning 01709 336009 or emailing Housingsolutionsteam@rotherham.gov.uk between the hours of 8.30am to 5pm Monday to Friday. We have regular outreach service across the Borough and will aim to respond to any alerts in a timely manner. Please provide as much information as possible about the location of the individual you are calling about.

Between 5pm and 8.30am please call the homeless out of hours service on 01709 336009.

You can also report concerns about anyone you see sleeping rough, via the Streetlink app, or report online: thestreetlink.org.uk.

For more information - [Homelessness: Homeless now or rough sleeping – Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council](#)