

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL HOUSING SOLUTIONS

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) Provision in Flintshire

Cabinet copy M Dec 2019

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SECTION 1 – POLICY STATEMENT

Background

Any extreme circumstances including weather and temporary risk of harm has an impact on those sleeping rough in our communities. Rough sleepers can be at risk of significant harm to health and in extreme cases death due to adverse weather or other circumstances which are extreme.

In order to minimise the risk to rough sleepers, where possible accommodation will be provided during times of adverse weather or other exceptional and extreme circumstances.

- 1.1 This policy outlines the measures that Flintshire County Council (FCC) and its key partners will put in place for people sleeping rough in Flintshire during severe weather.
- 1.2 This policy will ensure that FCC can provide suitable accommodation quickly to prevent harm and loss of life to any persons sleeping rough during times of exceptionally cold weather.
- 1.3 FCC will work with both voluntary and statutory organisations that operate within the local authority area
- 1.4 It is anticipated that the SWEP will primarily cover the months of November to March each year.

Equality

- 1.5 FCC aims not to discriminate and treat all people equally regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, disability or ethnic origin. We will also aim to comply with the Council's Welsh Language Scheme and communicate bilingually in English and Welsh to all our customers.
- 1.6 The SWEP will be reviewed on an annual basis or sooner to reflect changes to legislation and local partnership landscape.

SECTION 2 – LEGISLATION & BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 introduced a fundamental reform to homeless legislation which included placing a stronger duty on local authorities to prevent homelessness, allowing them to use suitable accommodation in the private sector. The Act is designed to help everyone at risk rather than just those in priority groups.
- 2.2 Welsh Government have made available to local authorities additional resources to support the change to a more prevention-focused approach, including availability of transitional funding to increase the capacity of emergency night provision for rough sleepers.
- 2.3 The Welsh Government's Code of Guidance of Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness 2016, recommends that all local authorities should have a written cold weather plan outlining its arrangements to give assistance in periods of cold and / or severe weather.
- 2.4 Every local authority should have a SWEP which is instigated when severe weather is forecast.

SECTION 3 – DEFINITIONS

What is Severe Weather conditions?

- 3.1 There is no national or statutory set definition of what constitutes cold weather and each local authority is responsible for defining it. FCC have decided that the trigger indicating severe weather provision, is any extreme weather which could include weather forecast predicting sub-zero temperatures or below taking into account the wind chill factor on the first night (otherwise known as the “feels like” temperature).

The temperature prediction will be taken from data provided on a daily basis by the MET Office.

Other exception circumstances

All circumstances will be considered that may cause a rough sleeper harm. This may also include but are not limited to:

- Instances of Street Homeless People being assaulted or targeted
- Instances of bad drugs going round resulting in risk of harm
- Outbreaks of sickness within the rough sleeping community

Definition of Rough Sleeping

- 3.2 There is no strict definition for rough sleeping, but it is widely regarded as including people who are sleeping or bedded down in the open air and people in buildings or other places not designated for habitation such as tents, sheds or any other situations which are not designed for legal residency.
- 3.3 For the purpose of this policy, a rough sleeper will be any person sleeping rough on the streets in extreme cold weather conditions. There may be some people who decide to sleep on the streets and it should be noted that FCC cannot force people into accommodation.
- 3.4 This SWEP will operate outside of the usual homelessness eligibility and entitlement to housing or temporary accommodation, for example those with no local connection will be placed under this protocol on the first night that they present.

Current Provision Emergency Bed Spaces

What will the authority provide?

- 3.8 Accommodation will be provided where there are vacancies to rough sleepers on a night by night basis. This accommodation will most likely be provided in a Community Centre or similar facility. The accommodation need not meet the suitability of accommodation standards for Homeless Accommodation, but must be reasonable.

Accommodation may sometimes be B&B provision where this is deemed more appropriate and cost effective.

Flintshire County Council Housing Solutions staff will work in partnership with services and FCC volunteers to try and secure accommodation for any potential rough sleepers.

The client will be subject to the same rules and regulations as all other homeless applicants entering temporary accommodation and will be required to adhere to the terms and conditions of the provision which will be issued upon access.

The Authority may not always respond with the provision of accommodation, but may provide items to relieve circumstances that may cause risk or distress. This may be for example; assistance to access medical help for sickness, survival kits etc..

SECTION 4 – IMPLEMENTATION OF SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCY PROTOCOL (SWEP)

Procedure:

- Cold weather is monitored by the Council Homeless and Advice Team and Chief Officer Team to identify when the cold weather triggers the cold weather provision. Activation of SWEP based on severe weather will be authorised by a Chief Officer.
- Any extreme circumstances outside of severe weather will be verified by the Homeless and Advice Team by making enquiries with relevant services such as police, Health, SMS, probation and any other services who are able to verify temporary extreme circumstances.
- Once SWEP has been activated the Homeless and Advice Team manager will inform all personnel on the contact list as follows:

Housing Solutions Service (To identify staff to assist in set up and running of emergency provision)
Vulnerable Adults Service (For information)

Adults Social Services (For information)

Communications team (To inform of SWEP activation on social media and other relevant forums)

FCC Connects Centres (For information)

Forest Care Out of Hours Service (For information)

Housing Manager (To assist in access to identified Community Centre or other accommodation)

Outreach Services (To liaise with rough sleepers)

Emergency Planning Team (To co-ordinate staffing and volunteers)

Any external voluntary networks, where known

The Manager who is on call for out of hours will be alerted that SWEP has been triggered

- A secure record of known or suspected rough sleepers and their location will be retained
- Rough sleeper contacts the service and the Duty Manager will explore all possible options for the rough sleepers, this could include travel warrants to a relative/friend or referral to the emergency provision.
- A record will be kept of all those accommodated under the SWEP provision

Who will be considered for emergency accommodation?

- Any person who is verified as sleeping rough and has no other available accommodation.
- Any person applying for assistance will not need to prove a local connection.
- There is no obligation on the authority to provide accommodation for pets, but all efforts will be made to accommodate or find an alternative.
- A Client who does not pose an unacceptable risk to accommodation providers.

Should the rough sleeper decline the provision of B&B/emergency accommodation for whatever reason for example, unwilling to leave a pet or is deemed unsuitable for temporary accommodation by the authority, survival packs may be provided by partner organisations to assist and support individuals..

Clients who pose an unacceptable risk to accommodators will be signposted to partner agencies services for a survival pack.

SECTION 5 – RISK ASSESSMENTS

5.1 The Housing Solutions Team will complete a risk assessment to confirm any known risks for individuals who present themselves as homeless and will use this information when placing them in any form of accommodation.

SECTION 6 – REFUSAL TO ACCOMMODATION

6.1 If an individual has previously breached the terms of accommodation provided to them due to anti-social behaviour, threats of violence to staff, etc. FCC reserve the right to refuse to provide accommodation. In such instances FCC will still provide support and help organise a survival pack.

SECTION 7 – SUPPORT SERVICES & WAYS TO HELP

7.1 Many rough sleepers are working with a number of agencies and services. The Housing Solutions Team work with rough sleepers to identify and provide housing solutions as well as signpost individuals to relevant agencies. Those who present with support needs will be referred to the relevant departments for an urgent assessment of their needs.

7.2 If a member of the public has concerns about someone sleeping rough in England and Wales, they can use the website StreetLink on www.streetlink.org.uk or StreetLink mobile app to send an alert and the details are then sent to the local authority or outreach services. In addition to this, people can also contact the Housing Solutions Team on 01352 703799 during office hours or the Out of Hours Forest Care Service on 01344 786590. This will alert FCC about people that members of the public have seen who may be sleeping rough and in need of assistance.

7.3 When information is received, efforts will be made to contact individual(s) in order to offer them support and be considered for suitable accommodation.

7.4 FCC will endeavour to raise awareness of the help available to rough sleepers in the event of severe weather through Outreach services, social media and the Council's website.

SECTION 8 – USEFUL CONTACT NUMBERS / WEBSITES

Housing Solutions Team Officer Hours	01352 703799	www.flintshire.gov.uk
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Forest Care Out of Hours	01344 786590	
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StreetLink	0300 5000914	www.streetlink.org.uk
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Shelter Cymru	01792 469400	www.sheltercymru.org.uk
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Emergency Services	999	
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