



Severe Weather Emergency Accommodation Provision (SWEP):

Helping Rough Sleepers During Bad Weather

Cambridge City Council

Winter 2020/21

Introduction

Cambridge City Council and its partner agencies are committed to doing all we can to protect the health and ensure the wellbeing of rough sleepers during periods of severe weather. Our arrangements are designed to make sure that when the weather gets bad there will be a warm, safe place available at night for anyone who would otherwise have to sleep out.

In previous years, our Severe Weather Emergency Provision (SWEP) consisted of shared, single-gender accommodation across several sites in the city with a maximum capacity (in 2019/20) of 29. People at risk of rough sleeping were housed in large, communal rooms. Since 2013, SWEP has been augmented by the Cambridge Churches Homelessness Project (CCHP) which, last winter, offered up to 17 beds in a shared space for rough sleepers.

Since the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, and upon scientific advice, the government has ordered the closure of all shared sleeping sites. This means that we cannot run SWEP – and CCHP cannot run its programme of support – in the same way as we did in previous years.

Additionally, the council continues to provide individuals a safe place to stay, whilst the coronavirus pandemic persists, housing over 200 people in emergency accommodation since the March lockdown.

Whilst our approach to SWEP this year retains many of the principles of previous years' provision, the delivery of this year's provision will be significantly different.

This document:

- Explains the circumstances that trigger our severe weather emergency provision (SWEP) arrangements;
- Explains how the process will work.

The protocol has been developed to comply with the most recent [Homeless Link guidance](#).

The protocol has been developed in partnership with the following agencies and organisations:

- CGL Street Outreach Service
- Jimmy's Cambridge
- The Salvation Army, Cambridge
- Cambridge Churches Homeless Project (CCHP)
- Riverside Care And Support: The Victoria Project (TVP)
- Wintercomfort For The Homeless
- Cambridgeshire Constabulary
- Cambridge Access Surgery

- Cambridge Cyrenians
- Cambridge Link-Up
- Other members of the Streetlife Working Group

Principles of the Severe Weather Protocol

1. What assistance is provided under the protocol?

In normal circumstances the period during which severe weather provision will operate is from Monday 2nd November 2020 until Wednesday 31st March 2021. This does not mean that provision is made *continuously* for this period. Instead, if certain weather conditions occur during these months then the scheme described here will come into play. When these weather conditions cease then provision is called off.

Whilst everyone in the partnership has a stake in the success of SWEP, this year's key partners are:

- Cambridge Street Outreach Team (operated by the charity Change, Grow, Live) – who will take primary responsibility for identifying and assessing rough sleepers;
- Cambridge City Council's Temporary Accommodation Service – who will make offers of temporary accommodation (and, where necessary, transport) for those who are identified as needing the accommodation.

This year, the assistance will comprise:

- An offer of self-contained emergency accommodation (as opposed to the shared sleep sites of previous years);
- Where the offer is outside of the city: the cost of travel to and from Cambridge (an open return where an individual can easily stay outside of the city; or a fixed-period season ticket where someone needs to travel back and forth).

Who is eligible?

Under the provision, anyone verified to be rough sleeping in Cambridge City, and otherwise ineligible for emergency housing, will be offered emergency accommodation. This winter, the provision will run alongside the council's programme of emergency housing during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In practice, this means:

- An individual believed to be in 'priority need' of housing will be offered temporary accommodation under the council's statutory duties;
- An individual who is verified to be rough sleeping *and has not previously refused, abandoned or been evicted from COVID-19 emergency accommodation* will be offered on-going emergency housing, regardless of whether SWEP provision is available;

- An individual that is verified to be rough sleeping in the city (and who does not fall into either of the categories above) will be offered accommodation under SWEP.

As this is an emergency measure, accommodation will be offered to people including those with no local connection to Cambridge City and those foreign nationals with no recourse to public funds. The principal objective is to protect the health and wellbeing of rough sleepers during times of severe weather.

However, while there will be no conditionality about severe weather support for non-locals (other than an acceptable level of behaviour) we will seek to reconnect individuals to their area of local connection and would require local authorities to assist them under their own provision – including under the continued “Everyone In” programme. Such individuals, and the agencies, local authorities and support groups assisting them, will be expected to cooperate fully with this.

I’m working with someone who hasn’t been verified as rough sleeping. What should I do?

SWEP provision is aimed at providing warm, dry accommodation for those in Cambridge who have no other option than to sleep rough. As such, it is not being offered this year to people who (a) will be able to obtain assistance from their own local authority, or (b) have alternative accommodation (such as a friend’s sofa).

There may be individuals in Cambridge City who sleep rough but have never been verified as doing so. We would strongly encourage partner agencies to work with the Street Outreach Team to encourage individuals to be verified as rough sleeping. Individuals’ sleep sites can be recorded anonymously, and the data gathered (regarding sleep sites) will be used for nothing other than anonymous statistical purposes and the offer of accommodation. Alternatively, verification may be carried out, where resources are available, by officers of Cambridgeshire Police and Cambridge City Council.

In circumstances where it is otherwise clear that an individual is sleeping rough (but has not been verified), SWEP provision may be offered on a case-by-case basis.

Assistance is available all year round to ‘sofa surfers’ and those in vulnerable accommodation (through the council’s Housing Advice Service and commissioned / non-commissioned agencies). Details of the services available can be found on the [council’s website](#), as well as on the [Street Support app](#).

2. What is severe weather?

Many authorities, including Cambridge, set the basic trigger for opening emergency provision as being any period when the [Met Office](#) forecasts a temperature low of zero or under for three successive days.

However, this council goes considerably beyond this minimum measure of provision, making accommodation available in, for example, periods of prolonged heavy rain or high winds and during long periods of cold and damp weather. As winter progresses we also apply a common-sense approach, appreciating that long-term exposure to even mild winter weather will take a physical toll and so we may open provision at intervals to give a few days' respite.

Whatever the weather, we always endeavour to provide shelter over the Christmas period (from the night of 24th December to the night of 1st January inclusive), sufficient staff and volunteers permitting.

3. How will the severe weather provision be initiated?

The Council's housing advice partnerships manager (or someone delegated by that officer) will monitor the Met Office weather forecast throughout the severe weather period and will be responsible for making the decision to open and close provision, consulting with partner agencies where necessary. The decision to open will be made 36 hours before provision starts. This means, for example, that a decision to open on a Thursday evening will be made no later than 9am on the preceding Wednesday.

Once the decision to open provision has been made, the minimum period it will run will usually be three nights. The exception will be those rare occasions when a short but intense bout of bad weather (like a storm) is predicted and it makes sense to get people under cover if only for a night.

Any period of provision which includes a Friday night will normally be allowed to roll over to include the Saturday and Sunday nights, avoiding the risk associated with returning people to the streets over a weekend when other homelessness and welfare services are at reduced capacity. Additionally, when severe weather is forecast for any Saturday or Sunday, where possible SWEP starts on the Friday evening. These measures will make planning easier.

To ensure that providers and agencies know exactly what is happening, the Council will also let them know of borderline decisions to NOT call provision.

How will SWEP decisions be communicated?

The housing advice partnerships manager will communicate regularly with the council's Temporary Accommodation team and with the Street Outreach Team throughout the winter, giving early indication where possible of a likely SWEP period.

When a decision has been made to open SWEP, the Council's housing advice partnerships manager will:

- Contact the council's Temporary Accommodation team to confirm it will open;
- Contact the Street Outreach Team to confirm it will open;

- Send an email to all partner agencies (including those offering out-of-hours housing advice) to confirm the arrangement;
- Contact the Council's Corporate Information Officer so that the decision can be communicated on the Council's social media accounts.

4. What happens when the severe weather goes on for longer than three days?

If severe weather continues for longer than the initial three nights, it will be renewed on a day-by-day basis. The Council will inform agencies of the decision to continue or end provision with at least 48 hours' notice.

5. Who will oversee the process and how will it work?

The council's SWEP process will be overseen by:

- The council's Temporary Accommodation (TA) Team – who will be responsible for making bookings of accommodation;
- The Cambridge Street Outreach Team (SOT) – who will be responsible for identifying rough sleepers, assessing rough sleepers and communicating offers of accommodation to those who need it.

Over the course of the winter, SOT will carry out daily street shifts, responding to [Streetlink](#) referrals, Housing Advice referrals, calls from members of the public and other intelligence¹. They will verify rough sleepers and assess for support needs, building up a rolling list of those in need of accommodation.

Once SWEP is called, SOT will provide basic details to the TA team for each individual requiring accommodation. Based on the individual's support needs and the availability of accommodation, the TA team will confirm the offer to SOT, who will communicate this to the individual.

SOT will provide a 'main list' of individuals requiring SWEP accommodation by 10am on the morning prior to the first night of SWEP, with a cut-off time of 1pm for any additional individuals. In the event of a 'last minute' presentation, partner agencies may be able to call the TA team (prior to 5pm) or the council's out-of-hours housing advice service – which is also managed by the same team.

Each resident should also register with Jimmy's for a bed on a nightly basis and be prepared to take up a bed should it become available. If a resident cannot take up a bed in Jimmy's, an Exception Form should be completed (which allows individuals access to longer-term accommodation without requiring them to stay at Jimmy's first).

¹ As a note: it is crucial that SOT receive full and accurate information as to the location of a rough sleeper. A phone number itself will not suffice. Such information could include the exact location of their sleep site (so in an area such as Jesus Green or Cherry Hinton Hall, an indication of where they are in such a large site), a description of the individual and of any other bedding, a tent and so on.

6. How will provision be paid for?

SWEP is paid for by a grant from the Council – which this year will be diverted slightly, to directly fund accommodation. There will be no charge to the individual for using a SWEP bed, but people who are eligible to claim housing benefit will be expected to do so as a condition of their stay.

7. How will people presently banned from hostel services and COVID accommodation be treated?

Inevitably, many of those rough sleeping over the winter period will have been banned from either Jimmy's, the COVID emergency accommodation or other housing. This year's provision poses a particular difficulty, in that the council may need to decide whether to re-accommodate individuals in an environment from which they have previously been evicted.

The council will make a call as to whether to provide accommodation based on:

- The nature of the behaviour which resulted in the eviction;
- The likelihood of the same behaviour manifesting itself again;
- The level of support provided to the individual;
- The nature of any positive progress made by the individual in the interim period.

Ultimately, any offer of accommodation needs to bear in mind the safety of other residents and staff. People whose behaviour is so extreme that they cannot be permitted any accommodation may be referred to mental health services, or the police informed, at the discretion of hostel staff.

Conversely, an individual who has previously been evicted from the council's COVID-19 emergency accommodation may be made a fresh offer of emergency housing, if their SWEP stay demonstrates a change of behaviour and an ability to maintain accommodation for a sustained period.

Although SWEP exists primary to protect the health and welfare of people experiencing rough sleeping during the winter, it is ultimately a tool to help individuals back into longer-term accommodation. Individuals currently have access to a wealth of commissioned and non-commissioned services (in areas relating to physical and mental health, wellbeing, substance misuse, employment, training and so on): SWEP offers an opportunity to begin to link people into the support they may need to stay off the street for good.



Flowchart One: Cold Weather Provision Process

