

HEREFORDSHIRE SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCY PROTOCOL (SWEP) AND WINTER PROVISION

2022/2023

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Section 1. Introduction

The provision of shelter for people sleeping rough in England during severe weather is not a statutory duty, even during cold or severe weather when conditions may be life threatening. However, there is a humanitarian obligation on local authorities to do all they can to prevent deaths on the streets, and for their partners and the public to support these efforts.

Periods of severe weather may also provide increased opportunities to engage with entrenched rough sleepers and other so-called 'hard-to-reach' groups, who may be more likely to accept support, particularly in the winter months.

This protocol focuses on the provision of accommodation through the winter months and on emergency accommodation when the temperature falls to zero degrees or below. It explains how rough sleepers will be enabled to access accommodation and support during periods of exceptionally cold weather when SWEP is activated.

Members of the public are encouraged to report any incidents of rough sleeping to StreetLink www.streetlink.org.uk on 0300 500 0941, or directly to the Housing Solutions Team of Herefordshire Council on 01432 261600 or email to housing.enquiry@herefordshire.gov.uk The Housing Solutions Team also operate a 24/7 Out of Hours service 365 days of the year and can be contacted on 01432 261600.

Section 2. Aims

SWEP has two main aims:

1. To prevent loss of life due to severe weather conditions during the winter months.
2. To ensure that every effort is made to engage individuals with support services during the winter months and then actively encourage engagement to continue.

Section 3. Service Provision

3.1 Conditions when SWEP is operational

Herefordshire Council's Housing Solutions Team will take the lead on SWEP and will be responsible for checking the five day forecast every day before 11am. The forecast will be taken from the BBC weather website for Hereford, which is fed by the Met Office. The decision as to whether SWEP is activated will be made on the forecast for the next three nights and reviewed daily before 11am.

The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) will come into force when the minimum night temperature is forecast to drop to zero degrees Celsius or below.

SWEP will be de-activated when a forecast predicts two or more consecutive nights of a temperature above zero degrees Celsius.

Discretion will be exercised when deciding upon SWEP criteria when there is an occasional forecast of above zero temperatures in a long succession of sub-zero nights.

3.2 Accommodation

When SWEP is activated, the Housing Solutions team will ensure that accommodation is available to any person for whom there is a reasonable belief that they are roofless (rough sleeping) that night. This provision is subject to a risk assessment to determine any high risk individuals whose behaviour might be likely to present a risk to other vulnerable individuals. (See Section 3.5 below). At the very least any individual for whom accommodation is not possible will be provided with a 'survival kit'

During the period from mid December to mid March, a 'winter provision' is provided within Hereford City. (See Section 3.3 below).

When SWEP is activated and if accommodation is not available through the formal winter provision, the Housing Solutions Team will offer emergency accommodation, largely in B&B's. These are likely to be outside of Hereford City, and may be out of county. Service users will generally be expected to make their own travel arrangements to the accommodation provided; however, if lack of funds mean that someone would have to sleep out during the predicted cold weather, other arrangements will be made.

In such cases, service users will be made aware that the accommodation is being provided under SWEP provision only; will only be continued during the extreme weather conditions; and will end at short notice if the SWEP criteria cease.

The Accommodation Lead Officer, and the Temporary Accommodation Team will be responsible for ensuring any accommodation placements are cancelled when SWEP criteria cease. Every service user accommodated by the Housing Solutions Team under SWEP provision will be allocated a case worker and contacted regularly advising of Herefordshire Council's decision to accommodate.

Where possible, Housing Benefit claims will be completed for stays in SWEP temporary accommodation of four nights or more. The claim can be backdated to the beginning of the stay if necessary.

3.3 Winter Provision

Vennture – A Registered Charity are operating the winter provision for Herefordshire this year. Set out below is their statement of process.

“As of Monday 5th December 2022 the Merton will be open between 11am – 1pm, where we will be offering a safe space to those facing and experiencing homelessness to pull together support around them to keep them safe.

New Zara House has been made ready to open from Monday 12th of December 2022. This mirrors the same opening time as Winter 2021.

Individuals presenting as roofless, will be given wrap around support at the Merton and a strength based risk assessment completed to ensure right support at the right time. There are contingencies in place, covering eventualities of empty rooms outside of this set assessment time. The ‘assessment time’ has been brought into practice this year, due to the learning from last year highlighting community safety issues outside and surrounding White Cross Road. Our key driver to make sure our winter response is delivered with dignity, care and respect.

We are actively working with our partners at Hereford Council to secure further rooms at the Merton re: temporary accommodation.

For individuals who chose who remain on street, we will provide Street Safe packs, which have been developed with specialist agencies, to ensure meet the conditions people face sleeping outdoors. This includes sleeping bags with appropriate ratings, thermal mats to absorb ground heat absorption, foil blankets and tents to reflect heat and protect from weather conditions.

We are aware this year, many changes have been implemented and we recognise change can be difficult. Please be assured all changes and procedures have been developed with a person centred approach and inline with the government's transformation fund criteria and guidance.

We are continuing to develop the 'We care' fobs. We are keen to pool our skills and resources to protect and provide the best quality of care and support during this winter".

3.4 Relocation

During SWEP accommodation, the Housing Solutions team will provide relocation opportunities for those with no local connection.

3.5 Exceptional Circumstances

SWEP provision is not a statutory obligation for any local authority

If the service user is of exceptionally high risk, we may not be able to accommodate them through SWEP

A service user may be asked to leave the SWEP accommodation if they fail to comply with their terms of occupation. If that occurs, we will inform relevant agencies working with that individual that SWEP is in place, but that the service user is not being offered accommodation and the reasons why.