



SEVERE WEATHER RESPONSES

**SUMMARY OF WINTER PROVISION FOR PEOPLE
SLEEPING ROUGH 2012-13**

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

Following the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) and extended winter provision of 2012-13, Homeless Link conducted a survey of those local authorities and voluntary sector providers who planned and delivered this provision. This survey asked for information on the following:

- Type of provision that was made available
- Clients accessing the service
- Challenges and good practice in delivering the service.

In this report we outline the key findings from this survey.

1.2 DEFINITIONS

SWEP: provision triggered by knowledge of three consecutive nights at zero or below.

Extended winter provision: additional services provided over an agreed period of time.

1.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE DATA

We received responses from 126 services. It should be noted that we did not receive information from every service operating across England, and therefore numbers should be treated as a sample only.

2. TYPE OF PROVISION

We asked specific questions about the type of services that were provided during the winter of 2012-13. This section provides an overview of the findings.

2.1 REGIONAL BREAKDOWN

The regional breakdown in Table 1 shows the number of services that responded to our survey. It is not representative of the actual number of services provided across the country in 2012-13.

Table 1: regional break down of responses

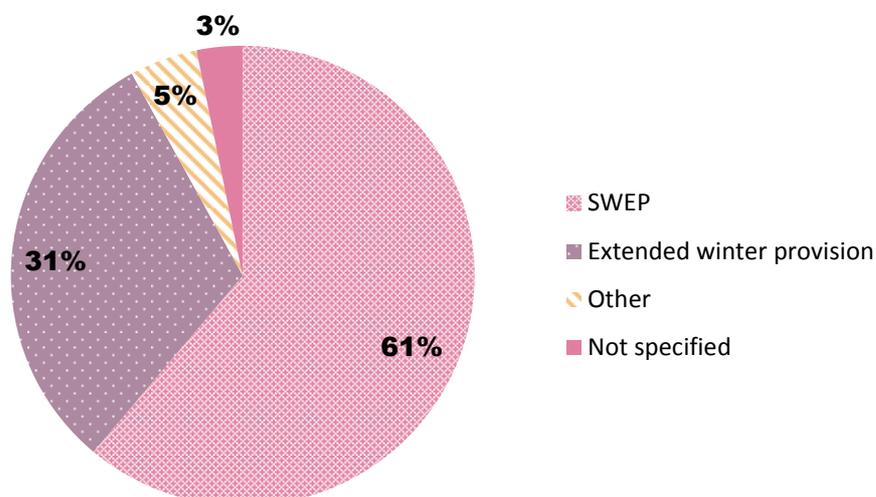
Region	Number of responses
South West	9
North West	16
Yorkshire & the Humber	12
West Midlands	18
East Midlands	6
North East	7
London	13
East of England	11
South East	34
Total:	126

2.2 TYPE OF PROVISION (SWEP OR EXTENDED WINTER PROVISION)

The following chart shows that the majority of the provision was provided under the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (61%). However, almost one third (31%) of respondents did offer extended winter provision either in addition to or instead of SWEP. This is a significantly higher proportion than was reported in 2011-12 (22%).

The 5% of 'other' types of provision are mainly services similar to SWEP but with extra discretion to take into account inclement weather such as snow and wind chill, as well as being more flexible on the length of time the temperature was predicted to be low, such as offering the provision as soon as zero degrees was reached.

Chart 1: type of provision offered (%)



2.3 LENGTH OF TIME PROVISION WAS IN OPERATION

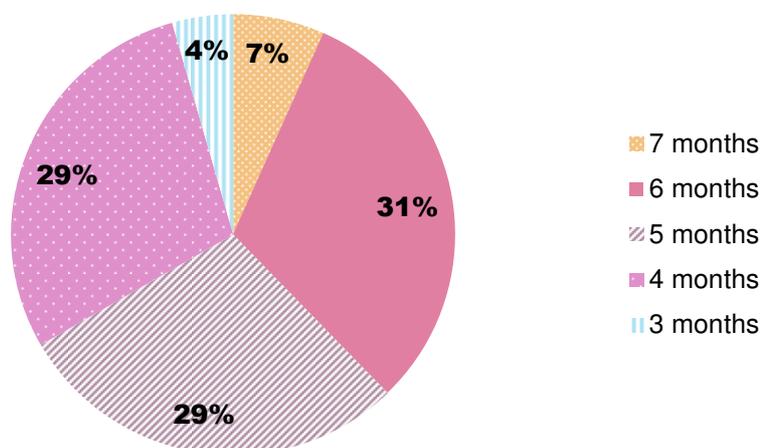
We asked providers how many nights their provision was made available and how many nights it was actually used. A summary of this information is provided at table 2. The information suggests that in some areas, while a response was in place at times of extreme weather, no-one approached to use this.

In addition to this, 45 services outlined the period through which their provision was offered. This highlighted the particularly long winter period experienced in 2012-13, with several respondents commenting that they provided their services for longer than in previous years. Chart 2 shows the numbers of months that provision was made available. The longest period of provision, reported by 7% of those that provided this information, was from October 2012 to April 2013 (7 months). The majority of services offered provision for 6 months, typically from November 2012 to April 2013. Many that were programmed to close in March continued until April due to particularly late spells of cold weather.

Table 2: number of nights provision was available and used

	Provision available	Provision used
Total nights	6813	5959
Average number of nights	54	47
Shortest	0	0
Longest	262	262
Services completing the question	114	114

Chart 2: number of months provision was made available (from 45 responses)



2.4 WHERE ACCOMMODATION WAS PROVIDED

Chart 3 below shows the type of accommodation used for SWEP and extended winter provision in 2012-13. B&B accommodation was the most common type of accommodation used, followed by hostel provision, usually in communal spaces/lounges. Provision classed as 'other' includes day centres, supported housing, local authority temporary accommodation and hosting schemes. Several services used more than one type of accommodation, e.g. use of B&Bs if demand exceeded the space available in a hostel. Each type of accommodation used has been counted (therefore the total adds to 153 rather than 126). It is important to note however, that these figures

do not relate to bed spaces - local hall and faith group provision accommodated some of the highest *numbers* of people, as can be seen in the following section.

Chart 3: where accommodation was provided (number of services)

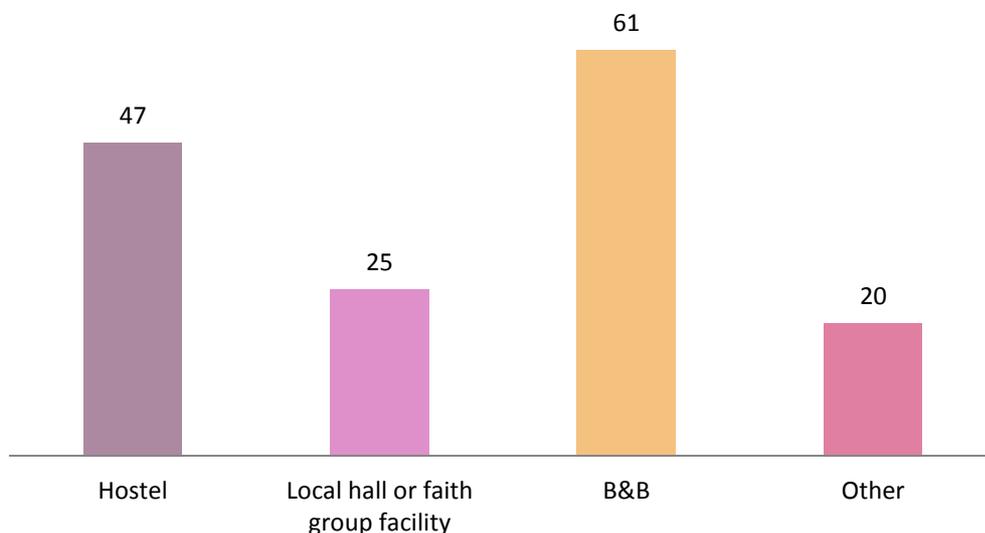
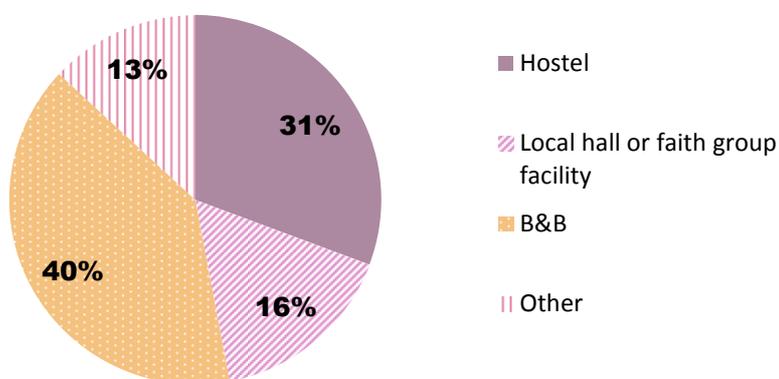


Chart 4: where accommodation was provided (%)



2.5 NUMBER OF BED NIGHTS

The term ‘bed night’ refers to one person staying for one night, **not** the number of different individuals accessing the service (which will be covered in a later section). Chart 5 below shows the total number of bed nights for each type of accommodation provided (as indicated by our survey respondents), and chart 6 shows the same information as a percentage of the total number of bed nights provided. When comparing this information to that in the previous section, we can see that although B&Bs were the most common *type* of accommodation used, they actually accommodated relatively low numbers of people. Comparatively, while only used by 16% of survey respondents, local hall and faith group facilities actually provided 57% of total bed nights. There are three main explanations for this:

1. Faith groups generally provide most of the 'extended winter provision' (i.e. they are open for longer)
2. Faith groups often have access to larger spaces such as church halls, which can accommodate greater numbers of people.
3. B&B use is particularly common in rural areas where numbers of people requiring assistance are relatively low.

The total range of bed nights across all types of accommodation was 0-9000. This reflects the wide differences in scale of service provision across the country.

Chart 5: Total number of bed nights over the period services were open

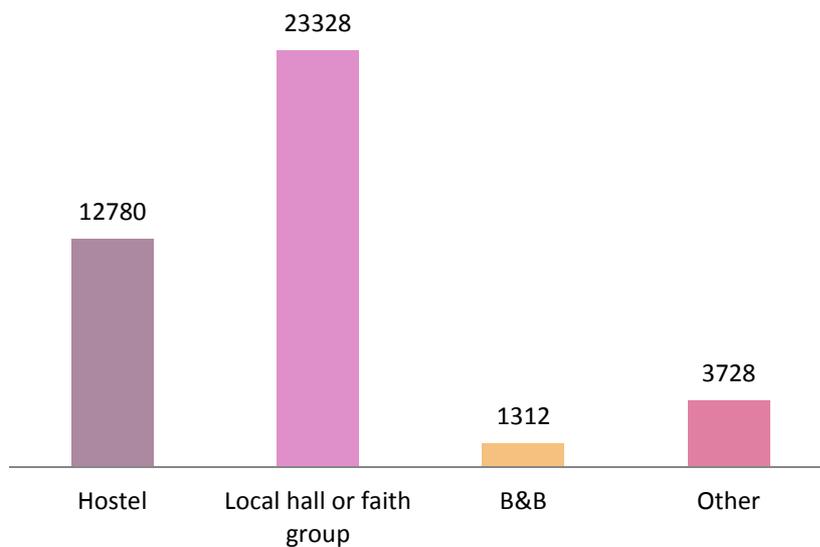
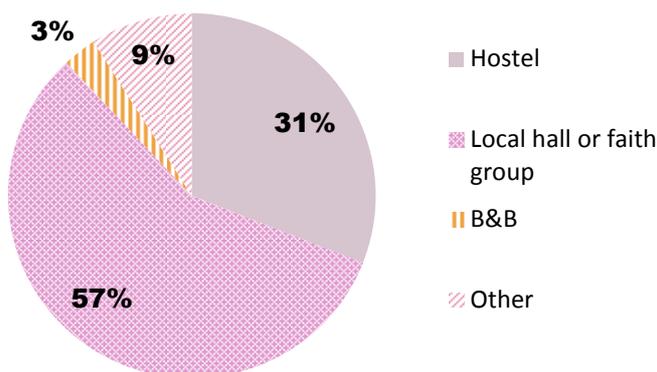


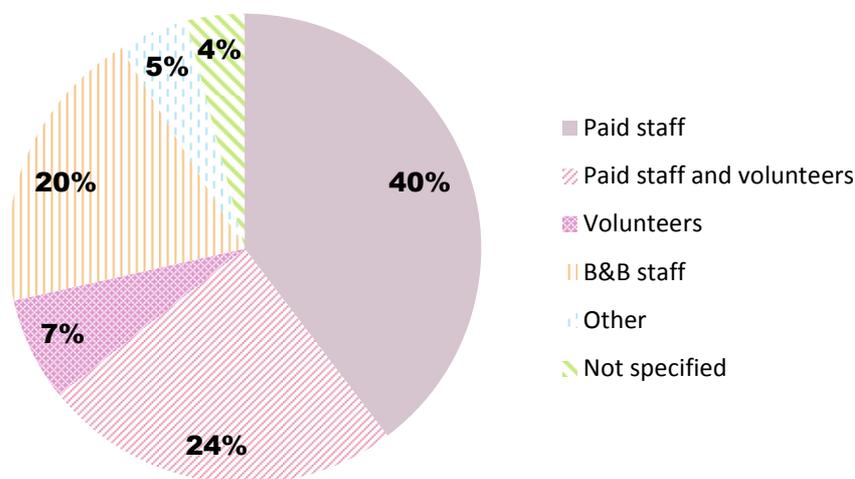
Chart 6: bed nights per accommodation type as % of total bed nights used



2.5 STAFFING

Most of the provision in 2012-13 was staffed by either paid staff or a combination of paid staff and volunteers. Only 7% of those who responded staffed their provision entirely by volunteers; however 20% used B&B staff, some of whom may not be trained or experienced in working with the client group, which could present an area for concern. All 126 survey respondents completed this question.

Chart 7: staffing arrangements for provision (% of services)



2.6 FUNDING

Table 3 below shows the different types of funding that services used. Most services used a combination of funding sources, with the majority being funded at least partially by local authorities, including through Homelessness Grants, Housing Benefit, Supporting People and DAAT. Only 16% services reported receiving no local government funding, most of these being voluntary / faith based organisations using their own internal funds and donations, or services that required no extra funding above their usual running costs. Responses classed as ‘other’ included sources such as voluntary agency internal funds, charitable donations, charitable trusts, churches, other voluntary organisations, and Department of Health/NHS funds – e.g. Warm Homes, Healthy People and NHS Winter Wellness Fund. Many services were provided using a combination of different funding sources.

In light of recent case law regarding the payment of Housing Benefit for night shelters¹ it may be of interest to note that of the 42 services that reported being funded through Housing Benefit, 15 used Housing Benefit as their *only* source of funding.

Table 3: funding of services

Source of funding	Number of services using each type of funding
Homelessness Grant	45
Housing Benefit	43
Other local authority funding	51
Other	34

72% of the services who responded said that they were able to deliver what they wanted to with their available funding. This is a reduction from 96% in last year’s survey.

¹ <http://homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-downloads/20130612%20Night%20Shelter%20Ruling.pdf>

2.7 REFERRAL METHODS

Table 4 below shows the different referral methods that were used by services this year. It shows that the majority of services accommodated clients through taking referrals from other agencies. These referral agencies varied greatly from place to place. Some services only accepted referrals from one or two designated agencies such as local authority Housing Options teams, while others encouraged referrals from as many agencies as possible, such as housing providers, outreach teams, drug and alcohol teams, Police, Probation teams, day centres, community organisations, No Second Night Out, hospitals, StreetLink, CABs, churches, out-of-hours teams, GPs and YOTs.

Almost 50% of agencies also allowed self-referrals, and one quarter of respondents did not operate any referral system at all – i.e. any client could turn up and receive assistance on the night. Many services used a combination of these different methods, with the aim of assisting as many people as possible.

Table 4: types of referral methods used

Referral methods	Numbers using this referral method	% of total services <small>(all respondents answered the question)</small>
Referral by other agencies	66	52%
Self / in-house referral	60	48%
No referral (open access to all)	31	25%

3. CLIENTS ACCESSING THE SERVICE

3.1 NUMBERS OF CLIENTS

In table 5 below we show the number of clients reported as using SWEP and extended winter provision in 2012-2013. Again, this data does **not** show the total number of people in the different regions who used provision, just the number reported to us in our sample.

Table 5: number of different individuals accessing SWEP / extended winter provision by region

REGION	NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS REPORTED	AVERAGE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS PER SERVICE
East of England	730	66
East Midlands	326	54
London	670	52
North East	119	17
North West	358	22
West Midlands	859	48
Yorkshire and the Humber	585	49
South West	360	40
South East	856	25
TOTAL:	4863	39

3.2 WHO IS ACCESSING SUPPORT?

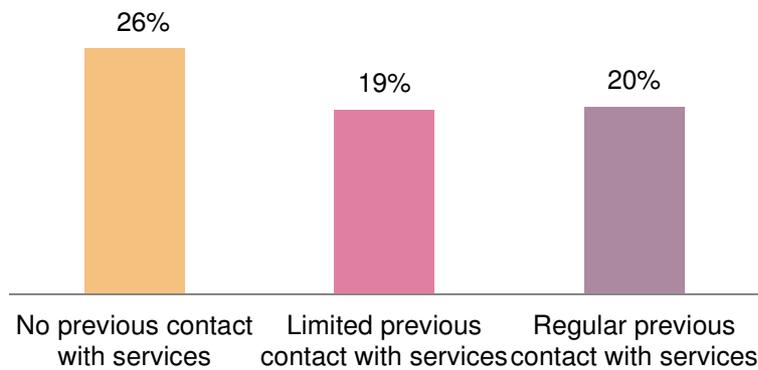
In table 6 we look at the make-up of clients to begin to establish a picture of who is using SWEP/ winter provision. The table shows that just under half of those using services responding to our survey this year were verified rough sleepers. 10% of clients had no recourse to public funds, presenting additional challenges to move-on and support. These figures are broadly similar to those recorded for 2011-2012.

Table 6: total, average and the range of number of clients seen who are verified rough sleepers, have a local connection, or have no recourse to public funds

	TOTAL	TOTAL AS % OF ALL CLIENTS
Verified rough sleepers	2146	44%
Client with a local connection	2421	50%
Clients with no recourse to public funds	491	10%

We are also able to see approximately how many clients were known to services prior to the SWEP and extended winter provision opening. Chart 8 reveals that a quarter of clients had had no prior contact with any services. While this may show that these people were new to the streets, it also suggests that there may be high numbers of non-verified rough sleepers who are remaining hidden from services. While these figures highlight the importance of severe weather provision in engaging with individuals for the first time, it is clear that agencies need to develop ways to engage with rough sleepers throughout the year and not just wait until periods of severe weather.

Chart 8: clients who had previous contact with services (% of total individuals recorded)



3.3 AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY

Of the 81 services that responded to this question, averages of nights stayed in the same accommodation throughout the winter ranged from 0-84 nights. This can be roughly calculated as an average of 8 nights per person.

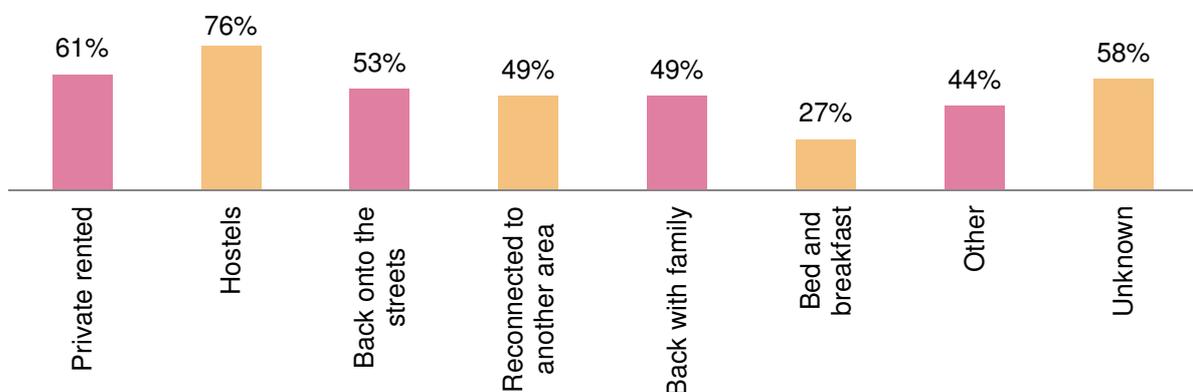
3.4 REFERRALS ON FROM SWEP AND WINTER PROVISION

We asked services how many of their clients moved on to further accommodation after their stay had finished. Out of the 98 services that answered this question 73 reported at least one positive move-on outcome (74%). This is something that varied greatly between services and the total range covered 1-101 positive moves per service.

In chart 9 below, we show the types of accommodation that clients moved on to. We show the percentage of services that recorded at least one move-on outcome for each of the options listed. Please note we do **not show** the actual numbers of clients moved. While we did ask for this information, we only received several responses which suggests that this is data that services chose not to collect or was particularly difficult to obtain.

We can see that hostel accommodation was the move-on option used by the highest number of services (76%). Over half of all services reported people moving back onto the streets, and 58% of services reported not knowing where clients had moved on to, which is an area of concern.

Chart 9: where clients moved on to - services that recorded at least one move to each accommodation option



4. CHALLENGES AND GOOD PRACTICE

Below is a summary of the main challenges experienced by services delivering SWEP / extended winter provision as identified by our survey respondents this year. We also include examples of how some providers have developed their approaches to alleviate these problems. For guidance on implementing good practice, see <http://www.homeless.org.uk/effective-action/SWEP-CWP>.

4.1 LACK OF MOVE-ON OPTIONS

This was a particular concern regarding individuals displaying high levels of risk and vulnerability, and those with no recourse to public funds. Some small towns and rural areas reported few voluntary agencies for onward referrals and several authorities noted a shortage of private landlords willing to take people who had been homeless. Finding move-on accommodation for people without a local connection proved an added challenge, especially as some people refused offers to be reconnected to their home borough / country. One local authority identified a need to work with providers and landlords around accommodating pets as not being able to access accommodation with their dogs was the main reason that individuals in that area returned to the streets.

Effective responses and examples of good practice:

- One authority made a commitment to finding move-on accommodation for all service-users before asking them to leave their SWEP provision. Provision was kept open until all placements had been made.
- One authority developed a strong partnership with neighbouring boroughs to meet the demand for move-on options
- One hostel allowed SWEP clients to access its pre-tenancy training course. Working with partners to find rent deposits for hostel residents meant that hostel spaces were freed up for severe weather clients.
- The use of starter tenancies and assistance via various bond schemes allowed the majority of SWEP clients in one district to move on to suitable accommodation

4.2 LACK OF ENGAGEMENT WITH SUPPORT

Several respondents reported that some of the most entrenched rough sleepers in their area refused to be accommodated at all during the winter months. Some suspected reasons for this include a reluctance to travel long distances e.g. to towns from rural areas, or individuals not liking the accommodation on offer, or not wanting to accept the additional support offered by some services. One agency reported close involvement of local Police this year, however on reflection, thought that this involvement may have deterred some individuals from accessing the service.

Another common challenge was that of clients being referred and/or booked into a service, but not showing up. This meant that in some cases vulnerable people were turned away, while beds remained empty. One authority reported that 20% of people given places did not turn up. While SWEP / winter provision was often seen as an opportunity to engage particularly vulnerable or hard-to-reach individuals in further support, it was noted that many people were not yet ready to contemplate change and/or did not want to access this support.

Effective responses and examples of good practice:

- One service commented how continuous provision throughout the winter meant that clients knew they were open and where to come. It also allowed for better and longer term engagement so that appropriate support and referrals on could be provided.
- One authority ensured that SWEP was used as an access point to many other services – e.g. mental health, GP, drug and alcohol support. They also offered a range of activities and facilities including food, games, musical performances and haircuts.
- One service commented how some of the clients in their 'Recovery Service' based nearby, volunteered to come along and cook for SWEP clients and also offered peer mentoring to complement the support given. This was popular with some of the hardest to engage clients.
- The addition of a breakfast club in one service led to increased engagement with support services from the most hard-to-reach clients
- Employing staff and volunteers who can speak the same languages as their clients led to increased engagement in some services.
- Several districts provided continued monitoring and support to rough sleepers who refused to accept shelter. Outreach teams made frequent visits and contact, bringing food, sleeping bags and information about services. Individuals were always encouraged to access SWEP facilities even if they chose not to sleep in the shelter.

4.3 LIMITED ACCESS TO APPROPRIATE ACCOMMODATION INCLUDING RELIANCE ON B&BS

A common challenge faced by respondents this year was limited access to suitable accommodation for SWEP use. Several reported a lack of suitable accommodation for groups such as:

- Women
- Couples
- Young people
- People with dogs.

Many, both urban and rural providers, reported a reliance on B&Bs in the absence of more suitable accommodation. These were often situated out of the borough or local area, which led to some individuals declining the offer of shelter.

Other problems with B&B use included:

- Reliance on staff who do not have experience of working with the client group
- Limited opportunities to engage with clients and offer on-going support
- Difficulty in monitoring onward movements
- Staff can be unwilling to accommodate SWEP clients or can display discriminatory attitudes
- Inflexible opening/booking in times
- Lack of vacancies
- High costs, especially if located out of the borough

Effective responses and examples of good practice:

- One housing association invested heavily in providing high quality SWEP accommodation. This was designed with the comfort and well-being of service users in mind and included new bunk beds and high quality smoking shelters
- Where B&Bs had to be used, one service provided transport to collect service users in the mornings and take them to a local day centre to access support.

- One service was offered across three separate locations to accommodate differing needs.
- One service provided high quality kennels and free access to vet care for service users' dogs.
- One authority had built strong relationships with B&B owners and trained B&B staff in working with the client group. B&B staff were committed to providing a safe and welcoming environment for service users, such as putting on Christmas entertainment and dinner.

4.4 STAFFING / VOLUNTEER ISSUES

On the whole respondents issued resounding praise and gratitude to all the staff and volunteers that had been involved in the SWEP and winter provision this year. Many commended the highly efficient and conscientious members of staff that have been responsible for coordinating provision in their areas, and many services would not have existed without the immense donation of time and energy from hundreds of community and church volunteers 'going the extra mile' to keep services open and running smoothly.

It was generally acknowledged that using a combination of paid staff and volunteers was the most effective staffing arrangement, including close matching of different roles and responsibilities to individual skills and levels of experience. Some of the issues that were highlighted as particular challenges around staffing included:

- The expense and difficulty of recruiting experienced staff for short term / sporadic contracts
- Difficulties in recruiting enough volunteers in some areas
- Lack of suitable training for volunteers
- Some volunteers disregarding good practice guidance leading to increased risk of incidents

Effective responses and examples of good practice:

- Several services recruited client volunteers from nearby hostels who had personal experience of rough sleeping. This proved invaluable in engaging with some of the most hard-to-reach individuals.
- Several services reported that it had been essential to recruit at least one paid coordinator whose role was solely to coordinate SWEP / extended winter provision. This individual had provided a single port of call which had led to immediately improved outcomes and more effective service delivery.
- One service described their improved application procedure for volunteers, which included full CRB check, interview and comprehensive training programme. All volunteers were recruited in advance of the service opening and given 3 days training covering practical considerations about running a shelter, as well as information on health and safety and maintaining professional boundaries.

4.5 POOR COOPERATION AND LACK OF CONSISTENCY BETWEEN LOCAL AUTHORITY AREAS

Several authorities reported a demand for their services that they were not always able to meet. One factor contributing to this was that of people being directed from neighbouring authorities that did not operate SWEP themselves. In some areas this led to an increase in clients without a local connection, which presented problems when looking for move-on options after SWEP had closed. In other areas, differences in approach to SWEP sometimes led to individuals being put at risk or experiencing poor service. Examples included individuals being sent back to areas they had a local connection in, despite these areas not operating SWEP and offering no provision.

Effective responses and examples of good practice:

- Some Local Authorities provided joint SWEP provision and joint commissioning of outreach teams with neighbouring boroughs.

4.6 INCREASED DEMAND

(HIGHER VOLUMES OF PEOPLE REQUIRING ASSISTANCE, PARTICULARLY VERY VULNERABLE / HIGH RISK INDIVIDUALS)

Many respondents reported a greater demand for their services than in previous years, causing time and resources to be increasingly stretched. In different areas, this included greater numbers of:

- young people
- people with no recourse to public funds
- non-UK EEA nationals

Increased problems with language barriers, people without ID and people who are not able or willing to be reconnected to their home authority / country has added to the pressures facing services, meaning that it has sometimes been difficult for them to provide the most effective assessments and levels of support.

Effective responses and examples of good practice:

- One provider highlighted the need to have a range of services on site for particularly vulnerable people and those with multiple needs e.g. health services such as podiatry offering immediate access to assessment and care.
- One authority funded separate provision for under 25s
- Several services recruited staff who could speak languages common within the local rough sleeping population
- Several services expect even greater demand next year and intend to increase their provision accordingly. Others described plans to improve their assessment and referral procedures next year to ensure that those with highest need receive support first.

4.7 LOGISTICAL ISSUES INCLUDING OPENING AND CLOSING TIMES

Logistical considerations such as when projects would open and close, when people could be booked in and how people were referred caused challenges in certain areas. Lack of flexibility within staff rotas often meant that services didn't open until late e.g. 9pm, when there wasn't enough time to assess risk and provide support effectively. Many services had an early checkout time, requiring people to leave the premises for the day, meaning that options for meaningful engagement with support were limited.

Effective responses and examples of good practice:

- One service introduced a 'Breakfast Club' this year, allowing people to stay longer in the mornings and supplying a hot breakfast. This provided greater opportunity to engage people in support and led to improved move-on outcomes.
- Some services operated flexible opening times, with several making improvements to their booking-in and referral procedures, such as offering lunch time booking-in and assessment sessions. Opening earlier allowed more time for assessment and provision of appropriate support
- One service reported staying open until a Monday despite being programmed to close on a Sunday. This allowed better coordination with other support services.

4.8 PROLONGED AND LATE PERIODS OF SEVERE WEATHER

The particularly long and late periods of severe weather experienced this year (lasting into April) meant that several services stayed open beyond their planned closure dates. In many cases this meant continuing to provide services with very limited resources and a shortage of volunteers to cover the whole period.

Effective responses and examples of good practice:

- Several providers commented on the increased opportunities that the prolonged periods of cold weather offered, to engage with the most entrenched rough sleepers.
- The weather experienced this year has meant that many services are already planning well ahead of their provision for next year, with the hope to raise funds to be able to stay open longer in 2013/14.

4.9 INADEQUATE ASSESSMENT AND DATA COLLECTION

Some services reported concerns around staffing, referral procedures and opening times which resulted in a reduced ability to conduct effective risk assessments for all clients. Some reported unwillingness among partner agencies to share information relating to risk, and others reported problems with or inexistence of effective monitoring and data recording systems. A common problem was that of individuals moving on without services being able to trace them – use of B&Bs increased the risk of this happening.

Several services requested that Homeless Link surveys be issued at the beginning of the winter period so that they know the data they will be asked to feed back on.

Effective responses and examples of good practice:

- Several services implemented improved monitoring and data collection procedures this year, which enabled them to better reflect on practice and celebrate their positive outcomes.
- Revised referral and assessment procedures, often in conjunction with earlier opening times, meant that several providers were able to complete more comprehensive risk assessments and offer more targeted support
- Several providers utilised Homeless Link's template monitoring form and monitoring and evaluation tool, which enabled comprehensive data collection.

4.10 INFLEXIBLE RESPONSES TO SWEP ACTIVATION

While many authorities have become more flexible around instigation of SWEP, several still adhere strictly to the 'three consecutive nights at zero' minimum standard, and do not take account of factors such as wind chill and other inclement weather conditions. Several providers expressed frustration when activation occurred late in the day resulting in provision of a rushed and less effective service.

Effective responses and examples of good practice:

- Several authorities offered provision throughout the winter period, not just in extreme weather.
- One authority abandoned the temperature gauge, and encouraged staff to have a more humanitarian response, deciding that 'if it was too cold for us to be outside then it was too cold for anyone else'.

- Many authorities did not stick rigidly to the minimum activation guidelines for SWEP this year (3 nights below zero). A range of more flexible responses were reported e.g. taking account of wind chill factor, activating whenever cold weather was forecast or when weather was particularly wet or windy.
- One authority did not close their SWEP provision until they had found positive move-on options for all clients who had used the service.

4.11 INCREASED COSTS / FINANCIAL LIMITATIONS

While most respondents reported having adequate funds to run their services effectively, some struggled with increased costs and several foresee challenges in being able to deliver the same services next year. Costs involved in transporting clients long distances to B&Bs, and funding B&B places caused some SWEP funds to become stretched. Other respondents reported difficulties in acquiring Housing Benefit – there has been speculation over whether these difficulties will increase in response to recent case law which challenges night shelters' eligibility for Housing Benefit². However a recent note from the DWP and Department for Communities and Local Government states that the Government believes that Housing Benefit can continue to be paid to users of the majority of shelters so long as the person's circumstances meet the housing benefit rules³.

Effective responses and examples of good practice:

- Many agencies used a creative approach to fundraising, acquiring money and donations from a diverse range of sources. One authority worked with local public transport providers who agreed to accept travel tokens from SWEP clients.
- Many services emphasised the importance of securing funding early, well before the winter period, and often as soon as services have closed in February / March.
- Several services used successful social media campaigns to increase donations from members of the community.
- Several services are improving their provision to increase eligibility for Housing Benefit

4.12 INCIDENTS AND CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR

Challenging behaviour was a common concern among many of our survey respondents. Some didn't feel they were equipped to accommodate particularly high risk or vulnerable individuals, and that there were little options available for these people. Others reported an increase in exclusions and evictions, predominantly due to individuals presenting under the influence of drugs/alcohol and causing conflicts with other clients. There were concerns over undiagnosed mental health conditions, as well as hostility experienced from existing hostel residents when SWEP was being provided within communal hostel space. Several local authorities expressed reluctance to assist people who had been evicted or excluded from hostels because of poor behaviour. This is a concern as these are often the people most in need of provision.

Effective responses and examples of good practice:

- One authority commented how using a range of agencies to provide their SWEP enabled them to refer people to the most appropriate service and reduce risks of conflict and disruption.
- One service described the positive impact of a more rigorous implementation of rules regarding intoxication. Each client was fully informed of the rules at referral and asked to

² <http://homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/team/night-shelter-uncertainty-must-not-prevent-support>

³ <http://homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/team/nightshelter-update-law-hasn%E2%80%99t-changed>

sign to confirm that they understood them before booking in. This led to a large reduction in incidents.

- One provider described the efforts they made to make service-users feel comfortable and safe – each was accompanied to the accommodation by their referral agency, given a tour, induction and helped to settle in.
- Many SWEP providers offered activities for clients such as games and entertainment, which helped people relax and interact positively with others, which helped reduce feelings of unease incidents of challenging behaviour.
- Several agencies reported positive relationships with local police, who provided effective support when necessary.
- Services using staff that were trained and experienced in working with the client group generally experienced fewer instances of challenging behaviour, and were able to manage incidents effectively when they occurred.

4.13 LACK OF COORDINATION / POOR COMMUNICATION BETWEEN AGENCIES

Some areas were hampered by a lack of coordination, especially when several agencies were involved in SWEP / winter provision. As in previous years there were some reports of poor communication and cooperation between agencies, a reluctance to share information, and a lack of awareness of SWEP provision among partner agencies.

Some respondents commented that local No Second Night Out initiatives caused added complications. This was with regard to individuals who had refused their single service offer, and individuals who were eligible for NSNO but were refused assistance.

Effective responses and examples of good practice:

- Many areas have prioritised strong communication and collaboration between agencies, as this is widely regarded as one of the most important factors in delivering an effective severe weather/winter service. Different agencies have included night shelters, B&Bs / motels, outreach teams, hostels, police, health care, housing options teams, benefits agencies, NSNO, Out of Hours services, volunteers / faith groups, food banks.
- Several respondents highlighted the need for all agencies to meet and agree clear protocols and procedures well in advance of likely cold weather periods. One Authority has already set up a working group to start planning for next year's SWEP provision, ensuring that everybody is 'on board' early.
- Many services recruited a 'coordinator' for their SWEP / winter provision. This provided a 'single port of call' for partner agencies and reduced instances of confusion / mis-communication.

4.14 INFLEXIBLE REFERRAL CRITERIA

Although SWEP exists as a humanitarian response regardless of statutory responsibility, several local authorities continue to ask for rough sleeper verification and/or local connection before they offer assistance. With limited accommodation and funds available some of these authorities expressed concern over how to ensure that they support the people in greatest need of assistance first, and have seen rough sleeper verification as one way of achieving this.

Effective responses and examples of good practice:

- Many services provided assistance to all clients regardless of whether they had rough sleeper verification or local connection.
- Where resources were limited, successful partnerships between neighbouring authorities and/or providers ensured that everyone presenting for assistance was accommodated. All individuals were given a full assessment before they were directed to the most appropriate support. This may have been SWEP provision, existing accommodation options, other local services or opportunities in other areas

4.15 CHALLENGING SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Our survey responses reflected a deep concern about future ability to meet demand for SWEP / extended winter provision. This is largely due to reasons outside providers' and authorities' control, such as introduction of Universal Credit, the 'bedroom tax', and the Benefit Cap, all of which may contribute to increased demand for assistance and reduced options for move-on. One service described a "palpable atmosphere of despair" during provision this year, linking this directly to increased incidents, challenging behaviour and risks to safety of others. Several authorities said that they may be able to offer little more than statutory provision next year.

Effective responses and examples of good practice:

- Services described a huge amount of effort and creativity in an attempt to mitigate the effects of current socio-economic challenges. These include:
- Personal efforts made by volunteers going 'above and beyond' what has been asked of them
- Support and generosity from many community groups and local businesses
- Positive representation in local and social media, leading to increased donations, improved awareness and community support
- Support from elected members who have promoted local services and represented the needs of clients