

# Planning for SWEP in winter 2020-21

## Research briefing on areas plans for SWEP during Covid-19

### **Produced by**

Homeless Link Policy and Research Team

### **Acknowledgements**

With thanks to everyone who responded to Homeless Link's survey

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## Let's end homelessness together

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## About

### **PURPOSE OF THIS BRIEFING**

This briefing provides an overview of planned SWEP provision for the coming winter of 2020-21 in light of the current Covid-19 pandemic and measures introduced by the UK Government. The briefing is designed to consider the current capacity of local areas to meet demand in the event of SWEP being initiated.

### **BACKGROUND**

In October 2020, Homeless Link undertook a national survey with homelessness professionals, including commissioners and policy leads across local authorities. The aim was to gain a sense of how the sector is planning for SWEP this coming winter, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic and the introduction of measures under the Coronavirus Act 2020 and the Government's 'Everybody In' initiative. This briefing will share some of the key findings from this survey to create a picture of the capacity of local areas to provide SWEP.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE SURVEY**

The survey was distributed by Homeless Link to contacts who have previously responded to our SWEP surveys and via our National Partnerships and National Practice teams. As responders represented only 84 of the 326 local authorities in England we can only say that this provides a snapshot of plans for SWEP this year. It is possible that those who responded were also those further along in their planning.

### **WHAT IS SWEP?**

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) is provision of accommodation provided to people sleeping rough, which is triggered by the forecast of freezing, near freezing or otherwise severe weather conditions. Many areas offer 'extended winter provision' which is the provision of additional services over an agreed time period e.g. every night from November to March.

### **WHY WILL THIS YEAR BE DIFFERENT?**

In the past, many areas have provided SWEP in settings which require people to share the space with others. This may be using the communal areas of hostels, day centres and single or multi-site church and community shelter provision.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the implementation of social distancing measures, these settings are no longer being encouraged for SWEP provision. Local providers are now being asked to provide self-contained accommodation in line with guiding principles as outlined by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), which are intended to minimise the risk to all individuals:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-provision-of-night-shelters>

## Survey responses

84 different areas responded to the survey; 81 responses were from local authorities and the remaining three were from homelessness support providers (two commissioned and one non-commissioned). We asked them about their provision during the winter of 2019-20 and their plans for this coming winter 2020-21.

### **WINTER 2019-20**

Respondents reported using different types of accommodation for SWEP and extended winter provision during winter 2019-20. These included B&Bs, hostel 'sit-up' services, and accommodation funded through the Rough Sleeper Initiative. 42 of the areas responded said they had used night shelters. Many areas used a

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combination of provision. For more information on last year's provision, see the Severe Weather Responses Report 2019-20 published here: [www.homeless.org.uk/swep](http://www.homeless.org.uk/swep)

### WINTER 2020-21

Due to Covid-19, local authorities and their partners have been required to significantly adapt the way some services are provided to people sleeping rough in their areas. We asked what types of accommodation they planned to use for SWEP this year, and responses included:

- B&Bs, hotels and hostels (including block booking)
- Units funded through Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP)
- Hostels and supported accommodation including 'crash pads' and placements across the pathway
- Emergency provision which already exists due to Covid-19
- Self-contained temporary accommodation
- Vacant council buildings
- Council owned self-contained units
- Student accommodation
- Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)
- Nightstop for 16-24 year olds
- One LA was considering the use of emergency pods

Whilst some respondents said they would still be using night shelters, or were exploring this, most were not due to the risk to health in these shared settings.

*'We have commissioned 8 SWEP beds and have the ability to use our own homelessness hostel. The voluntary sector are also reviewing their offer and looking at alternative accommodation in which they can deliver winter provision which includes SWEP provision. We will fall back on bed and breakfast provision if required'.*

*'As a LA we took on a block of flats for the Covid provision and we are looking at stepping up a couple more of these to use as SWEP/ crash pad facilities. We have asked our commissioned providers if they could step up one place each, as we know they cannot share. Also as a last resort we would use B&B'.*

Some respondents mentioned that additional support and adaptations would be required to enable Covid-safe SWEP to take place. This included ensuring deep cleaning regimes are in place and that where individuals need to share facilities, self-contained provision would be available for individuals testing positive and needing to self-isolate.

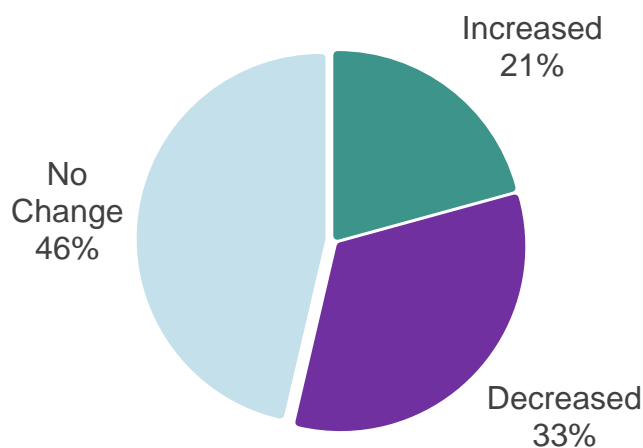
In some areas, work was underway with voluntary sector providers, to adapt the provision of night shelters to ensure it was Covid-19 secure. This included:

- Working with the night shelter provider to find self-contained accommodation
- Procuring individual rooms instead of shared sleeping space
- Shelter exploring options such as hosting, or reducing shared facilities
- Local authority leading on accommodation but coordinating with shelter providers to ensure volunteer support and other resources are in place
- Securing spaces that can be modified to be Covid-safe (carrying voids)
- Working with night shelters to ensure they have the guidance and do not open or open in a safe way

### PLANNED CAPACITY

32% of respondents to the survey expect that their capacity of SWEP provision would decrease this year, whilst 20% believe their plans will increase the capacity. 45% said there would be no expected change to capacity.

Graph 1: Reported capacity changes for SWEP Provision 2020-21



The overall national picture was mixed with local planned provision, in part, reflecting the responses to local need, existing available accommodation and funding arrangements. For example, some responders highlighted they already have existing provision in place to accommodate those sleeping rough throughout the year where this was identified as a local priority issue. Greater Manchester's 'A Bed Every Night' scheme, offers an example of a localised response where emergency provision is being provided annually through a mixed funding model.

In addition, some responders stated they had secured accommodation through the Government's Next Steps Accommodation Programme <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/next-steps-accommodation-programme-guidance-and-proposal-templates>

This has ensured that those who are currently accommodated under the Government's initial Everybody In scheme would be offered continued interim accommodation and move on support during the current Covid-19 pandemic.

### 'DECREASED CAPACITY'

32% of responders acknowledged that there was decreased capacity for delivering SWEP this winter. In particular, the need for new self-contained accommodation and loss of existing shelters were highlighted as driving factors behind this.

This translated into a likely increase in use of B&Bs and hotels during the winter months. These also needed to be factored into existing budgets, with expected increased costs that these would bring:

*'£26,000 needed to pay for hotel rooms and additional night staff'*

In addition, there were other challenges highlighted by those facing decreased capacity, including:

- Loss of volunteers during the pandemic

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- Lack of available B&Bs and Hotel places
- Reduced staff capacity and new restrictions in place for staff practice

Responders to the survey were already addressing this to provide mitigating factors, including:

- Making additional funding bids to the MHCLG for bed spaces
- Working with B&B providers to secure accommodation in advance of SWEP
- Working with non-commissioned providers to help provide Covid-19 secure accommodation

## FUNDING

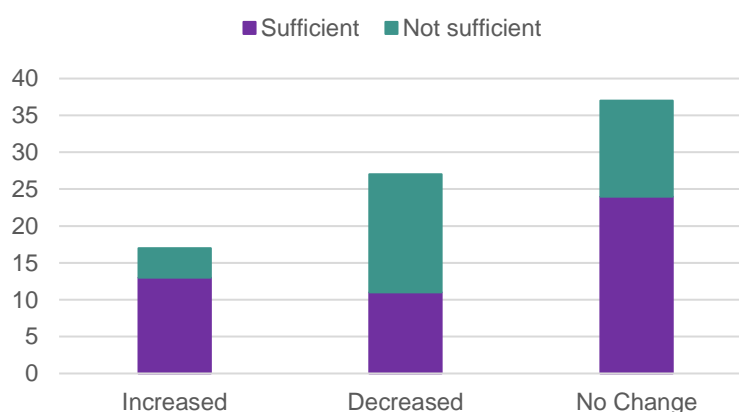
Additional funding for winter provision was announced by the Government on 13<sup>th</sup> October. This included a £10million Cold Weather Payment and an additional £2million 'Winter Transformation Fund' to support faith and community groups to offer single room Covid-19 secure accommodation.

64 responders (76%) expressed they will have to apply for this new funding, with a corresponding 18 responders (23%) who would not.

Of the 64 that said yes, they would need to apply for this funding, 28 did not expect this to be sufficient enough to carry out the activity they expect to deliver. In total, 33 responders (39%) did not expect the funding to be enough to carry out planned activity.

Across the 3 categories of capacity that we surveyed we found different responses to current proposed funding as shown below

Graph 2: Funding expectations across different capacity levels



In some circumstances, where responders had seen either no change in capacity, or an increase to their capacity, there were also concerns expressed that the funding for provision would still not be sufficient (20% in total). This is likely to indicate that these responders were expecting a potential increase in demand.

We currently do not have corresponding data relating to potential demand for SWEP provision although responders to the survey did express that this was a concern for themselves in light of the on-going Covid-19 pandemic.

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*'There is pressure on all types of accommodation currently should the pandemic or associated policies lead to increased homelessness then rough sleeping may increase in the new year'*

20 responders to the survey highlighted that there had been partnership working between local authorities and non-commissioned providers of shelters to help bring them into the guidance as set out by the UK Government and Public Health England. This has resulted in some adaptations being made to existing night shelters to ensure they are Covid-19 safe and can support with meeting potential rises in demand. This is also supported by the Winter Transformation Fund <https://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2020/oct/20/homelessness-winter-transformation-fund-launches> that will support faith and community-based groups to provide Covid-19 secure accommodation.

### CONCLUSIONS

The current Covid-19 pandemic and the measures that have been introduced by the UK Government present a unique challenge to the application of SWEP during the forthcoming winter months. Analysis from the survey shows that in many areas plans are already in place to diversify existing accommodation to ensure that local areas can attempt to meet the demand over the coming months. However, challenges still remain, as highlighted by responders to this survey. Attempts to replace existing shared and communal shelters with self-contained Covid-19 secure accommodation may mean a potential reduction in capacity that cannot always be met with existing funding.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Findings from this survey have been used to update our guidance on providing SWEP and extended winter provision, accessible at [www.homeless.org.uk/swep](http://www.homeless.org.uk/swep).

Homeless Link would like to thank the local authorities and voluntary sector agencies who responded to our survey. If you want to be included in next year's survey, or to share any intelligence about the challenges your area is facing this year, please email: [joanne.prestidge@homelesslink.org.uk](mailto:joanne.prestidge@homelesslink.org.uk).



## **What we do**

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless in England. We work to make services better and campaign for policy change that will help end homelessness.

## **Let's end homelessness together**

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