



Winter Provision and SWEP Toolkit 2021-22

Practical guidance, tools and good practice examples for local authorities and providers of SWEP and winter provision

Produced by

The National Practice Development Team

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Let's end homelessness together

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About this guidance

Every year Homeless Link publishes refreshed resources to support local authorities (LAs) and partner agencies to provide emergency accommodation to people sleeping rough during cold weather, when risk of serious harm and death from sleeping outside is significant. This guidance relates to the winter period of 2021/22.

LAs, voluntary sector organisations and Government are working towards the elimination of rough sleeping and hopefully a future where there is no need for emergency winter or severe weather provision at the levels we have seen previously. Whilst the COVID-19 pandemic led to the 'Everyone In' approach of offering emergency accommodation to anyone sleeping rough, the ending of this initiative in most areas means that those sleeping rough, or at risk of rough sleeping, are no longer automatically offered emergency accommodation. Once again therefore, consideration needs to be given to the provision of emergency accommodation during the winter months.

Housing Justice Winter Night Shelter Network

Housing Justice is a charity that supports faith and community groups that operate winter night shelters. Faith groups can become members of the Housing Justice Winter Night Shelter Network and can access support and good practice resources. Housing Justice also supports data collection from, and evaluation of, winter projects and operates an accreditation scheme to support providers to operate in line with best practice. They also publish a good practice toolkit for winter night shelters which has been adapted to reflect the changing models of shelters away from dormitory style provision¹.

Key considerations for planning winter provision & SWEP

The following table provides a summary of some of the key considerations that might need to be worked through when planning winter provision and SWEP. It is particularly relevant to LAs but may also be useful for others involved. The remainder of this document elaborates on these key factors, offers further guidance and includes some early examples of positive practice from across England of winter and SWEP provision arrangements planned this winter.

¹ See <https://housingjustice.org.uk/night-shelters/our-resources>

Winter Provision and SWEP - key considerations for LAs

	Key things to consider	For more information:
Planning ahead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Who is the LA lead in planning for winter provision and SWEP? ○ Are the Public Health team aware/involved? ○ Which organisation will have overall responsibility for the operation of the provision? How far will the LA be commissioning winter and/or SWEP provision? ○ Is there an existing multi-agency group for planning provision and making key decisions, or does one need to be convened? ○ Does this form part of the LAs wider rough sleeping strategy? ○ Does this group link to the local Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) and the wider winter planning arrangements for your area? ○ How will you include the voice of lived experience in your planning? 	Page 9-10
Geographical area of coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Will the provision cover just one LA area or is collaboration across more than one LA area more suitable e.g. this may be more beneficial/viable if numbers are low in any given area. 	Page 9
Winter project, severe weather provision or both	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does your area ideally need provision that covers the whole winter period? ○ If your area has a winter project is there enough capacity for it to be used for SWEP placements or do you need additional SWEP provision? 	Page 8
Capacity/need	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What data do you have to indicate the likely need for winter and SWEP beds e.g. numbers of people seen sleeping rough in recent months? ○ What data do you have about different demographics/support needs of those sleeping rough that can ensure your provision is tailored to those accessing it? 	Page 16
Service model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What buildings can be used to meet the need? ○ Are there opportunities for the LA, faith groups, local businesses or other organisations to gift a building or offer discounted lease/rental terms? ○ How far can your winter provision and SWEP reflect good practice and reduce the risk of COVID-19/flu transmission by consisting of single room or fully self-contained accommodation units? 	Page 10 and Greenwich case study on page 11

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If provision is going to include communal sleeping areas – is there a clear reason why and has the LA and the local Public Health team been involved in reaching this decision? ○ How far will your provision meet the needs of different cohorts – men, women, people who are non UK nationals, people with restrictions on eligibility, LGBTQ+ people, young people, people with dogs? ○ If it is going to be run as a communal sleeping model, what hours will it be open, what COVID-19 safety measures have been put in place for triaging and testing guests and isolating guests who may test positive? 	
Support and move on pathway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What additional services, such as support, food, signposting and immigration advice can be provided/delivered? ○ Can you help broker relationships with organisations that might need to work together, including specialist organisations? ○ Have you got a move on pathway to help people access longer term accommodation and support? ○ Could you consider an ‘in for good’ approach where no one has to return to rough sleeping? ○ Have you considered the support needs of non-UK nationals who may have restrictions on accessing benefits and services? Could you help with access to specialist immigration advice? 	Page 19 onwards and Barnet case study on page 23
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How will provision be funded? ○ Have you helped to identify possible sources of funding such as HB, LA funding, and if a charity is involved then also fundraised income, HWTF and other charitable funding? ○ How are you funding SWEP provision? Does this include income from HB? What about people who have restrictions due to their immigration status? 	Page 15
COVID-19 safety measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If the provision includes some shared facilities (including bathrooms, kitchens etc) have you considered arrangements for triaging and testing potential guests? ○ What arrangements have been agreed for minimising transmission between guests and staff and volunteers? ○ What arrangements have been agreed where guests test positive for COVID-19 and need to self-isolate? ○ How far can support and assistance be offered to guests to take up a COVID-19 vaccination/booster vaccination where relevant? ○ Have you engaged with your local Public Health team to ensure your provision is considered safe to operate? 	Page 13, the night shelter Operating Principles and guidance for hostel providers issued by DLUHC

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<p>Eligibility & access arrangements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is the provision accessible to everyone sleeping rough, or at risk of rough sleeping, including people with restrictions due to immigration status? ○ What organisations/people will be able to make referrals? ○ Is the eligibility criteria and assessment process as light touch as possible? ○ Who will assess eligibility, how will this be done and what is the decision-making process? ○ Will verification of someone's rough sleeping status be required? If so, does this avoid someone having to sleep rough again? 	<p>Page 7-9, 18</p>
<p>Trigger of SWEP provision & communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Will the LA place rough sleepers in emergency accommodation for the whole winter or only in severe weather? ○ What definition of severe weather will you be adopting for triggering SWEP? ○ What flexibility will you have to allow for different types of weather conditions to trigger SWEP, such as snow, heavy rain, and strong winds which can all lead to significant risk of harm or death? ○ Who in the LA monitors the weather forecast during the winter months? How will this be managed if the person is absent or out of hours? ○ Do you have a network to share SWEP plans and notifications when SWEP has been triggered and when it ends – including outside of office hours? ○ How far are you using your website and media channels to ensure communication is as effective as possible? 	<p>Page 8 and Reading case study on page 17</p>

Why is winter provision/severe weather emergency accommodation needed?

Following the ending of Everyone In, there is once again no universal offer of accommodation mandated for people sleeping rough in England. The provision of shelter from a council is not a statutory duty unless a person is considered homeless and in priority need of assistance, even during cold or severe weather when conditions may be life threatening. However, there is a widely recognised humanitarian obligation on LAs to do all they can to prevent deaths and serious harm on the streets, and for their partners and the public to support these efforts. This has meant that for many years, LAs and local partners including faith and community groups, work together to provide emergency provision during periods of cold or severe weather.

Sometimes this can be limited to provision of support only in severe weather but is increasingly offered throughout the winter period. In some cases there can be winter provision which is supplemented by severe weather beds. Winter and severe weather beds can be 'commissioned' and funded by the LA but in other areas they are funded in other ways.

There is no single definition of severe weather for the purposes of triggering emergency accommodation – any conditions that increase the risk of harm to people sleeping rough can be classed as severe. This includes extreme cold, wind, snow, rain and even heat. LAs should not presume when, or in what form, severe weather will occur, and should be prepared each year to escalate responses as and when required².

Having a flexible approach can often be most effective. Bear in mind that many people sleeping rough will already have health issues caused or made worse by homelessness. They may also experience added complications due to drugs, alcohol, pain or medication. It should not be assumed that people sleeping rough have somehow become resilient to severe weather – if anything, the risk of harm and death from exposure is higher for people sleeping on the streets, as their health may already be suffering³.

Cold: extreme cold can cause serious health problems and death for those who are exposed overnight or for long periods of time. Historically, SWEP provision was triggered when the forecast was zero degrees or below for three days. It is now best practice to take a common sense approach, where any forecast approaching zero is considered; the impact of rain, snow and wind chill are taken into account; and the 'feels like' temperature is checked, along with conditions underfoot (e.g. ice). There are benefits to opening provision for temperatures that are above freezing as this can be just as harmful, and for maintaining this provision over longer periods. These benefits are discussed throughout the guidance.

Wind: high winds can lead to an increased risk of injury through uprooted trees, falling walls, dislodged pieces of roofing and other debris. LAs should consider the location of local rough sleeping sites and the potential for harm from gale-force winds. This is a particular issue for rural areas where people are, for example, sleeping in tents.

Rain: heavy or sudden prolonged rain can lead to flooding and landslides. People sleeping under bridges, on river banks or near the sea, streams or canals may be particularly at risk, but there may be less obvious flood risks, for example drains or gullies. Standing water, puddles and flooding may continue to be a risk after rainfall has stopped. As well as increased risk of drowning, being stuck in the rain and unable to change out of wet clothes/shoes afterwards can lead to a range of health problems, including trench-foot. There is also an increased risk of loss or damage to belongings such as identification documents.

² The Government publishes guidance for local authorities on winter planning to prevent excess winter deaths although this only briefly mentions rough sleeping: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cold-weather-plan-cwp-for-england>

³ <http://groundswell.org.uk/what-we-do/peer-research/out-of-pain/>

Heatwaves: people sleeping rough may find it difficult to source drinking water and sun protection, increasing risks around dehydration, sunburn and sunstroke. Needs are likely be more urgent during daylight hours, so a different approach to SWEP may be appropriate e.g. free water and sunscreen, cool daytime spaces, and links to healthcare⁴.

In addition to the direct risk associated with severe weather, the actions people might take to protect themselves from severe weather can also increase the risk of harm and death. People might find cover in unsafe places e.g. large lidded bins, which can result in crush injuries or death if the bin is emptied. They might enter buildings or property without permission, including derelict structures, with associated risks around fire safety and building collapse. People may also increase their substance use as a coping mechanism during bad weather. Attempting to keep safe and dry in bad weather increases the risk of death and injury to people without shelter.

Winter and SWEP provision is intended to minimise anyone having to sleep rough. It is therefore good practice to have provision that as far as possible is open to everyone that would otherwise be sleeping rough in the local area, including those with restrictions due to immigration status.

What is winter provision?

In many areas, organisations operate emergency access accommodation throughout the winter period. These are often operated continuously between November and March, are commonly run by community or faith-based groups and usually making extensive use of volunteers. Some LAs directly commission or work in partnership with voluntary agencies to provide extended winter provision.

These winter accommodation models in the past have tended to be 'night shelters' usually involving dormitory style rooms with camp beds either in a fixed location or 'roaming' models where several different venues are used. These models are usually open only to provide overnight accommodation and with varying degrees of support and help with move on. Access, referral routes and eligibility criteria vary, but tend towards an 'everyone in' approach ensuring that anyone on the streets can access regardless of immigration status and entitlements.

This provision has played a significant role in minimising harm and death to people who might otherwise sleep rough and have helped engage people whom other services have struggled to engage. However, due in part to COVID-19, many providers of winter shelters are changing their approach; offering more support, extended opening times, move on support pathways and many have been remodelled to include single room accommodation. The overwhelming majority of winter projects last winter consisted of single room accommodation and there are increasing numbers of projects looking to permanently remodel away from shared sleeping spaces.

What is SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol)?

Having adequate winter provision helps minimise the need for additional emergency accommodation in periods of severe weather. But every LA should still have a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) which is used when severe weather is forecast. SWEP is a locally agreed procedure and offer, followed to minimise harm or death to anyone who might be sleeping rough, through the provision of emergency

⁴ See our guidance relating to heatwaves: <https://homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/guidance-on-severe-weather-emergency-protocol-swep-and-extended-weather-provision>

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accommodation to support someone off the streets immediately. A local SWEP document is often published on the LA website or shared with local agencies.

As already mentioned above, we recommend that protocols should be flexible based on empathy for people sleeping rough in severe weather, rather than sticking to a fixed approach. LAs should consider factors such as wind chill, snow coverage and duration of extreme weather when considering provision. The protocol should aim to prevent deaths on the streets so, if this means increasing the number of beds and opening for longer, the LA should do everything it can to facilitate SWEP and prevent harm. The protocol should be implemented (i.e. accommodation made available) on the first night when the agreed activation trigger is reached.

Historically, the minimum SWEP response used by many LAs was a forecast of zero degrees, or below zero, for three consecutive nights. The three-night guideline was an attempt to define 'severe weather', but a common sense approach is now widely adopted as standard practice, where SWEP triggers take into account weather warnings, near-freezing temperatures, rain, snow, wind chill, gales or heat.

In areas where rough sleeping is not always an issue, including rural areas or where numbers are very low, there should still be a SWEP plan to ensure suitable accommodation can be provided quickly should the need arise. This could be through delivering SWEP in partnership with neighbouring authorities.

The LA should allocate responsibility to one of its team for monitoring the weather forecast (agree to use a single forecast e.g. Met Office), activating SWEP and ensuring suitable provision is available. A rough sleeping or homelessness co-ordinator is the most likely person to take the lead on implementing SWEP.

As with winter provision, SWEP operates outside usual eligibility and entitlement frameworks that govern access to housing. It should be accessible to everyone, including all those who may otherwise be excluded from service; people with restrictions due to immigration status, people who may have previously been excluded or banned from services, and those with no local connection.

Targeting individuals should be on the basis of need, not housing entitlement. Where possible, LAs should work closely with outreach teams, day centres, police/community safety or other agencies supporting people experiencing homelessness, to identify and target people known to be sleeping rough (e.g. as opposed to sofa surfing, where support is needed but there is not an immediate risk of harm).

Verification (confirming that someone has been seen sleeping rough) is sometimes used to ensure that people who are most in need are prioritised for accommodation, however a flexible approach should be adopted. People should not be sent back onto the streets to be verified. Bear in mind that individuals often have good reasons for concealing their sleep sites, for example due to vulnerability to assault or fears of enforcement, and so verification of rough sleeping should not be used as a barrier to offering SWEP.

Planning ahead

SWEP accommodation should be planned by each LA in partnership with voluntary, faith and community partners, utilising homelessness grants and local authority funds. Plans should be reviewed annually in consultation with partner agencies after each winter.

SWEP plans should usually be agreed by the end of September (or as soon as possible) to ensure that partners are prepared. Extended winter provision should also be planned and reviewed in a similar way. Good practice in delivering SWEP and extended winter provision requires cooperation and partnership working

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across agencies, both within the LA and more widely. LA housing and homelessness teams will usually take a lead in coordinating SWEP, but voluntary sector providers, outreach services, police, health services, food banks, neighbouring councils, assessment hubs, faith groups and mental health services should all be involved.

Consider having a Winter Planning Group (with key stakeholders including representatives from Public Health teams and the Health and Wellbeing Board). Think also about including people with lived experience of homelessness and obtaining views and feedback from people using the provision.

Top tips:

- ✓ Use multi-agency meetings and forums to plan SWEP and winter provision early. Key stakeholders will include Housing Options, other LA teams (for example Community Safety, Public Health and Adult Social Care) local housing providers, people with lived experience, outreach teams, health services, police, churches, faith groups, other charities & community groups and day centres
- ✓ Work with other local authorities/sub-regionally to coordinate provision, including joint commissioning of support teams
- ✓ Keep updated about who is sleeping rough and their support needs and accommodation preferences
- ✓ Monitor temperatures and communicate with partners to ensure provision can be implemented quickly
- ✓ Encourage partnership working between the police and outreach services in order to identify and support individuals in need
- ✓ Encourage multi-agency communication daily in order to coordinate SWEP so that everyone can access provision – this could be daily email and phone calls about activation and options

Choosing an accommodation model this winter

Winter and severe weather provision is changing as a result of concerted efforts by homelessness service providers and by LAs towards models of provision which minimise shared sleeping arrangements. As well as providing a safer environment which reduces the likelihood of COVID-19 transmission (and other communicable illnesses) single occupancy options provide more privacy and safety for specific groups, such as women and LGBTQ+ people. They are generally preferred by people experiencing homelessness, allow for greater engagement and more personalised support and appear to be more successful in achieving longer term outcomes for people⁵.

Whilst it may not always be achievable, LAs and providers should make every effort to provide self-contained accommodation or single room options for people sleeping rough. Models could include:

- B&B and hotel rooms – either used on a nightly booking arrangement or through a block booking arrangement. In a number of areas smaller hotels have been used exclusively as winter provision.
- Privately rented houses and flats that have been purchased, leased or rented by a service provider and used as shared houses or Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) where guests have use of their own room, sometimes an en-suite room or with some sharing of facilities such as bathroom and kitchen.
- Hostels and supported accommodation allocating specific rooms or areas including 'crash pads' for emergency use.
- Re-directing existing units of supported accommodation as emergency accommodation.
- Temporary or modular structures such as 'pods' which have been placed on sites owned by service providers or local authorities providing short term self-contained units.

⁵ See evaluation of winter shelters commissioned by Housing Justice: <https://housingjustice.org.uk/night-shelters/our-resources>

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- Vacant council buildings being temporarily allocated as emergency accommodation which are either self-contained or adapted as shared houses with single bedrooms.
- Student accommodation.
- Nightstop or hosting models where guests have their own bedroom living in a house with a host.

LAs and Public Health must make it a priority to work alongside faith, community and voluntary sector partners to accommodate everyone safely, regardless of immigration status, previous housing experience and local connection.

Providing more dispersed and self-contained accommodation options is likely to mean that additional support and resources (such as food) will need to be mobilised in order to meet the needs of people being housed. Working with partner agencies to adapt existing provision or create new support packages will be essential.

When planning SWEP and/or winter provision, agencies should check that they have suitable accommodation for different groups e.g. women, couples, young people, and people with dogs. In any type of provision, support should be provided to assist people to meet their needs and achieve positive move-on if possible.

Communal sleeping accommodation models

Due to COVID-19, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities ((DLUHC, formerly MHCLG) published operating principles relating to the provision of night shelters accommodation⁶. The principles have been updated several times but continue to refer to accommodation models with shared sleeping spaces as presenting higher risks to health than self-contained or single room accommodation. It specifically refers to rotating models (where multiple venues are used) as very high risk. It states:

“Providers and commissioners of night shelters should consider whether they can provide self-contained accommodation options. For clear safety reasons individual rooms and individual washing facilities should be the aim to appropriately protect individuals from communicable diseases such as COVID-19.

All forms of night shelter present a level of risk to people with clinical vulnerabilities. However, it is even more challenging to implement robust infection control and outbreak management in rotating night shelter models. These models present greater risks to all those involved.”

The Government (and Homeless Link) continues to encourage the provision of self-contained or single room provision as the preferred model however, it is acknowledged that communal sleeping models may in some areas be used as **‘a last resort’** when alternative options are unavailable. Where communal sleeping spaces are used there should be a clear reason for doing so which has been agreed by the provider, the LA and Public Health. There are particular risks which need to be considered and measures which need to be included as part of the planning and management of that provision.

Greenwich Winter Night Shelter and Royal Borough of Greenwich

Greenwich Winter Night Shelter (GWNS) is an established winter night shelter which provides emergency accommodation, warmth and support for 15 people over the winter months. Since 2014, they have run a ‘one shelter, seven venues’ model with the support of a part-time project manager and 300 volunteers.

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-provision-of-night-shelters>

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The pandemic meant that GWNS was unable to offer accommodation last year as the risk of transmission was too high. This prompted a decision to move away from the rotating model and focus on setting up a static shelter. The Royal Borough of Greenwich (RBG) have supported GWNS to acquire and renovate a building which will accommodate 9 guests in single rooms. One section of the building has been set aside for women only with separate toilet and shower facilities. GWNS is currently developing its casework function and will be relaunching a year-round daycentre in collaboration with RBG to provide additional support services such as medical and welfare advice. They are hopeful the new model will provide more stability and consistency for guests as well as provide opportunities to increase service provision to work towards breaking the cycle of homelessness.

Cambridge City Council and It Takes a City Cambridge

It Takes a City (ITaC) Cambridge is a partnership providing a framework and mechanism to enable public, private and third sector bodies, and individuals, to work together in new ways to end rough sleeping in Cambridge. Cambridge City Council has worked closely with ITaC for several years. The adoption of the 'Everyone In' approach last winter, offering high quality en-suite student accommodation, showed what a different and better model could look like, not quite "somewhere to call home" but somewhat on the way, compared to the pre-pandemic model of dormitory style winter shelters.

This year they have worked together to design a similar offer, albeit on a smaller scale due to the decreased levels of rough sleeping in the city. ITaC have secured the use of a 20 en-suite bedroom facility with a large kitchen/dining/living area estimated to be sufficient to meet local need.

The offer will be available to those rough sleeping in Cambridge City from November to March through a partnership between Cambridge City Council, Cambridge Churches Homeless Project (CCHP - which ran a church-based night shelter pre-pandemic), the Cambridge Street Outreach Team (SOT - County and City Council funded assertive outreach team), a security provider and ITaC and their volunteer and partner network.

Guests will be referred to the accommodation by SOT and Cambridge City Council. Once in residence they will receive support from on-site staff and volunteers from the volunteer and partner network. Food and practical help, including from existing specialist agencies, will be provided. ITaC staff will work with the Council and other agencies to refer residents into Next Steps accommodation. Some of the costs of the project will be covered by Housing Benefit claims. The City Council will also contribute the funds it usually spends on cold weather provision and has supported ITaC to apply to the Homelessness Winter Transformation Fund to help fund the project.

Reigate & Banstead Borough Council and Renewed Hope

Reigate & Banstead Borough Council has worked alongside a non-commissioned local charity, Renewed Hope, for many years to support single homeless people within the borough along with their commissioned outreach provider (currently Thames Reach). Renewed Hope previously operated a floating winter night shelter across Reigate & Banstead and the neighbouring district of Tandridge (involving 16 different churches) as well as operating a drop-in day centre in Redhill. They also supported the delivery of hot meals to those in emergency accommodation last winter.

The council is working closely with Thames Reach to find routes off the streets for individuals sleeping rough both during, and outside of, severe weather periods utilising their RSI funding to fund some placements. Both the council and Renewed Hope have agreed to avoid shared sleeping space models again this

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winter. Renewed Hope will provide support and accommodation to single men needing more intensive support - which they anticipate this winter will consist of single rooms in a fully furnished four bed HMO property with shared facilities. This is not a commissioned service and some funding to support Renewed Hope with this project has been sought from the Homelessness Winter Transformation Fund.

The council will also use hotel accommodation and self-contained temporary 'cabins' (which have been placed in a local leisure centre car park and include cooking, washing and toilet facilities), and is working hard to deliver longer term options tapping into other funding streams.

Renewed Hope anticipate being able to operate the HMO property from December and will work collaboratively with the council and others to provide individuals with intensive support and ensure they are fully assessed under the Homeless Reduction Act - linking them in with statutory and non-statutory services to address support needs, providing emotional and tenancy support and help them complete the actions set out in their personal housing plan. Renewed Hope will provide a support worker along with one-to-one mentors and volunteers. Clients will be encouraged to access Renewed Hope's drop-in centre for daytime support and will follow the council rough sleeper pathway into longer term sustainable accommodation eventually.

Top tips:

- ✓ Where possible offer single occupancy rooms instead of shared sleeping spaces to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission
- ✓ Work with Public Health if communal/shared spaces are being considered
- ✓ Ensure accommodation has adequate facilities for washing, cooking, sleeping and storage of belongings
- ✓ Ensure accommodation is high quality and designed with the comfort and well-being of individuals in mind e.g. new beds, smoking shelters, dog kennels and free access to veterinary care
- ✓ Consider having different options available so that once individuals are triaged, they can access the most appropriate accommodation for their needs

Insurance

When using spaces for emergency/winter shelter accommodation, providers should check that their insurance policy covers the activity in the space being used. Most organisations providing severe weather interventions already work with people sleeping rough, so existing insurance is likely to be adequate. Unless there is change of use with regards to a building or space, changing your policy may not be necessary. If you are still planning on using a church or a town hall you may need to check what, if any, restrictions your policy has. Whilst rare, serious incidents can happen in temporary provision, so make sure you are adequately covered. Most companies can insure spaces relatively quickly, so this need not be a barrier to offering support.

COVID-19 & other health needs

People experiencing homelessness are likely to be more clinically vulnerable due to underlying health needs and inequalities. Ensure there is adequate triaging in place so that the most appropriate accommodation option is provided to those who are at serious risk of illness from COVID-19 and testing to reduce the likelihood of transmission. Work with local vaccination services and public health teams to increase vaccine uptake in those using the provision, staff and volunteers.

There are particular risks around COVID-19 which need to be considered for all service providers, but particularly when communal sleeping models are to be used due to the high risk of transmission in shared air

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spaces. Measures which should be included as part of the planning and management of provision are adequate ventilation, limiting of close contact, regular testing of guests and staff, monitoring of any symptoms, facilities and signage to encourage regular handwashing, support around vaccination confidence and uptake and providing alternative self-contained accommodation for guests who need to self-isolate⁷. Protocols for wearing masks and social distancing, where possible and reasonable, should also be considered to protect those accessing the service (e.g. staff and volunteers wearing masks, guests being offered masks to wear in communal areas). There should be clear arrangements for management of an outbreak.

In other models of provision which include some communal/shared spaces such as bathrooms, kitchens and/or living rooms, it is also necessary for providers and commissioners to consider how to minimise transmission and outbreaks. Again, measures that need consideration include support around vaccine take up and confidence, regular testing and separated provision for those who need to self-isolate. The Government has published guidance for commissioners and providers of hostels which could be helpful to these types of accommodation models⁸.

Top tips:

- ✓ Work in partnership so that communal accommodation options are only implemented as a last resort when leaving someone on the street would be a risk to health or life
- ✓ If a communal shelter is open, ensure other provision is coordinated so that someone can be supported to self-isolate if testing positive for COVID-19
- ✓ Any provision must adhere to Government guidance and principles
- ✓ Local authorities and Public Health should prioritise working with commissioned and non-commissioned services to adapt provision
- ✓ Ensure shelter providers are aware of the guidance and are supported to develop alternative options
- ✓ Shelter providers still planning to open communal provision should engage with Public Health and local authorities to have plans approved
- ✓ Resources on COVID-19 and working with health services during COVID-19 can be accessed on Homeless Link's website⁹.

We also have brief guidance for situations where people refuse or are unable to self-isolate¹⁰.

Any types of accommodation used should be fully risk assessed in relation to Government advice on COVID-19 and with the involvement of local Public Health teams.

People can become very unwell when sleeping rough in low temperatures. Providers should seek to involve health services so that those requiring treatment are identified and linked with the appropriate services to meet their needs. Relevant medical or public health advice should be sought to manage any concerns.

Top tips:

- ✓ Liaise with Public Health and other health colleagues to reduce the risks posed by exposure to cold weather
- ✓ Link with local GPs or clinics to offer people ways to manage their health; people can be referred to GPs as temporary patients

⁷ See www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-provision-of-night-shelters

⁸ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-services-for-people-experiencing-roughsleeping/covid-19-guidance-for-commissioners-and-providers-of-hostel-services-for-people-experiencing-homelessness-and-rough-sleeping>

⁹ See <https://www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/covid-19>

¹⁰ See <https://www.homeless.org.uk/covid19-homelessness>

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- ✓ NHS cards can be created to help people access GP registration¹¹.
- ✓ Arrange for health professionals to visit individuals in a proactive and responsive way to ensure health is monitored and support is provided when needed.

Funding options

There are a number of possible options for funding emergency accommodation which will depend on the model and scale of provision, the extent of volunteer input and other non-financial support.

Firstly consider how far the provision can be funded by the LA (or all LAs if it's a cross-borough model). This could include through use of their homelessness grants received from Government, or other LA funds including Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI) or Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) funding. Previously the Government has made 'Cold Weather Payments' to councils specifically for winter provision.

For the past two winters, Government has also made funds available for winter provision projects run by faith and community groups, referred to as the 'Homelessness Winter Transformation Fund' (HWTF)¹². This is specifically funding the remodelling of provision that moves away from shared sleeping models. This year, the HWTF includes a separate capital fund alongside a revenue fund. HWTF has been allocated on behalf of Government by Homeless Link, in collaboration with Housing Justice, directly to faith and community groups where they have the support of their LAs.

In addition to these main funding streams the GLA in London and other regional or combined authorities have also made funding available.

Some projects claim Housing Benefit and where this is agreed, agencies should work closely with the local Housing Benefit team to ensure that applications are processed quickly and delays do not prevent access to beds.

Using a diverse range of funding streams can make a service more resilient to the threat of cuts, and LA funding is often supplemented by voluntary donations and organisational funding streams. Services can also appeal to businesses and members of the public for 'in kind' donations. These resources can be maximised by advertising for specific items that are needed such as toiletries, food and travel vouchers. It is important to start putting plans in place for funding early, well before the winter period and often as soon as the previous year's services have closed.

Note on Housing Benefit: Following a tribunal decision in 2013, there was some concern as to whether HB could pay for night shelter services. However, a joint clarification note from DWP and what was then the Government's DCLG seemed to resolve this situation confirming that shelter charges can be HB eligible as long as they conform to the HB Regulations for eligibility¹³. However this is now some years ago and its current relevance may need to be questioned.

Top tips:

- ✓ Pool resources with neighbouring authorities to create options tailored for specific cohorts
- ✓ Coordinate with other authorities to reduce competition for affordable temporary solutions
- ✓ Use social media campaigns to increase donations from the community

¹¹ See www.homeless.org.uk/connect/features/2017/oct/06/homelessness-and-healthcare-right-to-register

¹² <https://www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2021/may/24/applications-to-capital-and-revenue-streams-of-homelessness-winter>

¹³ See www.homeless.org.uk/connect/blogs/2013/jun/27/nightshelter-update-law-hasn%E2%80%99tchanged.

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- ✓ Encourage providers to apply for Winter Transformation funding (although deadline for this year has passed)
- ✓ Block book hotel rooms and negotiate reduced rates
- ✓ Work with commissioned providers, and faith and community groups, to coordinate roles and resources
- ✓ Engage and involve Housing Benefit colleagues from the planning stage where relevant, to ensure all potential income is gathered

Identifying need

Planning should be based on current local need, including where there may be an unexpected demand/exceptionally severe weather¹⁴. Use available data sources such as intelligence from outreach and other partners (such as street pastors and park wardens), CHAIN or another database of local rough sleeping intelligence, and StreetLink referrals. Speak to people sleeping rough and seek to co-produce provision, as this is likely to increase take-up and positive outcomes¹⁵. You will need to know not only numbers, but support needs, types of housing and support that will be suitable, and how much provision may be needed for those with specific demographics e.g. women, young people, people with restricted eligibility, couples, LGBTQ+ people and people with dogs.

Recording, monitoring and sharing data

Capturing the demographic and support needs of individuals accessing SWEP and extended winter provision helps LAs and providers to plan effectively for the future. Recording information can be tricky when the service is being delivered quickly, but sharing information between services can save time and resources.

LAs and their partners are each responsible for ensuring they understand and comply with data protection legislation¹⁶.

Relevant information about a person's situation can help identify and respond to support needs, ensure future provision is effective and monitor whether current provision is serving people equally. Bear in mind that some people may be unwilling to disclose much information initially and this should not automatically exclude them from provision. Keep data collection under review to ensure it is relevant but where possible, record¹⁷:

- Names, contact numbers and emails
- Demographic data: gender, age/date of birth, nationality, ethnicity
- Primary support needs
- Length of time sleeping rough
- Previous contact with services, including past use of SWEP/winter shelters
- Where clients move on to when they leave e.g. return to the streets, positive move on etc.

Use of B&B accommodation can create additional difficulties when trying to monitor clients' move on, if there is no other support around the placement. LAs are increasingly adopting an 'in for good' approach but where this is not possible look for ways to measure outcomes, for example could B&B staff ask someone where they will go after SWEP, or can you arrange to meet/speak to the person as SWEP ends, and discuss what further support they might need? Ask people about how to keep in touch e.g. phone or email.

¹⁴ See Exceptional SWEP 2018 case study: www.homeless.org.uk/swep

¹⁵ <https://www.homeless.org.uk/co-production-toolkit>

¹⁶ <https://www.homeless.org.uk/introduction-to-gdpr>

¹⁷ A template monitoring form and tool produced some years ago may still be useful: www.homeless.org.uk/swep

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Ideally there will be regular contact from the SWEP Coordinator in order to engage people, including those placed in B&B, in order to find positive move on and to ensure individuals don't 'fall between the gaps'. There has been at least one instance of an emergency B&B placement where the person was later found to have passed away in their room. Coordinators must ensure that nobody is placed and then forgotten, and that there are procedures for closing SWEP cases and recording outcomes. Accountability for checking welfare and move on should rest with a named person or team, if not with the Coordinator themselves.

For more information on effectively capturing and using data, please visit:

www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/demonstrating-your-impact/collecting-data

Communication

Simple and effective communication is essential. If SWEP is going to open, this information needs to be shared quickly and as widely as possible, for example via the website and social media channels of the LA and partners, through local media and other platforms e.g. digital displays at transport hubs or areas of high footfall. There is little point in a LA activating SWEP if it's not communicated effectively so it helps bring in people who are, or would be, rough sleeping. Referral routes should be shared with police, outreach, hostels and other teams/services who may be in touch with people sleeping rough. If it isn't possible to publicise the address of SWEP provision, ensure the referral route/point of contact is publicised (e.g. via Housing Options or support providers), plus 'out of hours' arrangements.

Bear in mind that staff from other sectors may need more information to understand what is being offered and who it is intended for, to reduce the risk of inappropriate referrals. Hospitals, police and social service teams should be clear about when and how they can make referrals.

The public should be made aware of StreetLink¹⁸, so that referrals can be made alerting LAs about people seen sleeping rough in their area. You could also advertise a local telephone number and a statement along the lines of '*No-one needs to sleep rough - [insert Local Authority name] will ensure everyone has access to shelter. If you are concerned call this number.*' A single referral point is easier to disseminate than details of different arrangements, especially if your SWEP provision is spread across several providers. Use local newspapers, social media and email networks to communicate with as many people as possible.

Reading Borough Council

Under Reading Borough Council's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP), during periods of severe cold weather, where temperatures of 0° or lower are predicted to last a minimum of 3 nights, additional emergency accommodation will be provided for people that are rough sleeping in the borough. This year the council, St Mungo's, Faith Christian Group and Launchpad will be working with local accommodation providers to offer self-contained accommodation for these SWEP placements. Individuals do not need to have recourse to public funds or a local connection to access a severe weather placement.

Trigger of SWEP

The council and St Mungo's work together to review temperatures every day over the winter months - staff receive weather alerts from the Met Office and check the Met Office website daily to review predicted temperatures. SWEP is then activated when temperatures are predicted to be 0° or lower for 3 consecutive days. However, other severe weather conditions are taken into account, for example, severe snowfall/snow on

¹⁸ www.streetlink.org.uk

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the ground, wind-chill, widespread ice and 'feels like' temperatures meaning there can be other circumstances when SWEP is triggered.

Accommodation offer and how people can access it

Placements under SWEP will last for the duration of the identified period of cold weather according to the predicted temperatures. This year, accommodation placements will be in self-contained units. To access emergency accommodation during a SWEP period, individuals at risk of rough sleeping will be assessed and referred to a placement either through St Mungo's, Reading's commissioned outreach service, via the council's Homelessness Prevention Team or, if out of hours, via the council's Emergency Duty Service.

Communication

The council will email partners to inform them when SWEP has been activated with as much warning as possible and with an indication of how long it is predicted to last. Updates are provided at regular intervals to partners, including when SWEP is to be deactivated. The Street Support Reading Website will also be updated with details of SWEP and how to access it: [Street Support Reading - Working together to tackle homelessness in Reading](#)

Top tips:

- ✓ Designate or employ a SWEP/winter provision Coordinator to act as a single point of contact over this period (and ensure responsibilities are delegated when absent from work)
- ✓ Inform frontline staff across teams/agencies about what SWEP is, when it opens, and how to refer
- ✓ Regular communication with partner agencies before and during SWEP improves risk management and allows for discussion around trends, issues and improvements to be made in real time
- ✓ Use existing multi-agency meetings to plan and discuss the use of SWEP
- ✓ Ensure those who come into contact with people sleeping rough (especially out of hours) are aware of provision and referral routes
- ✓ Consider flyers with information of how to access SWEP
- ✓ Consider how people will travel to SWEP or other emergency provision and ensure distances and travel costs are not a barrier for accessing the service
- ✓ Partnership working between LA housing teams, outreach services and day centres – identify those likely to need provision, coordinate the approach to informing stakeholders about when provision opens and how to make referrals
- ✓ There may be potential to use SWEP placements as an opportunity to develop relationships with private hostels and work on their quality, health and safety

Logistics

Project logistics, such as when services will open and close, when people can be booked in and how people can be referred, need to be planned well in advance of the winter months and are especially important if a communal shelter model is being used. All project logistics must comply with guidance related to COVID-19

Clear procedures, written in plain English, should be put in place and communicated effectively to staff, volunteers, partner organisations and potential guests. A disorganised or inconsistent service increases risk, as staff are more likely to have to turn people away, and there may be frustrations for both staff and people using the service that can be avoided by better planning and communication. Feedback from the exceptionally severe weather in 2018 indicated that a single point of contact or coordinating team can play a vital role in making best use of resources and getting people into SWEP quickly and safely. Consider how people will

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access SWEP out of hours and where the access point will be located – wherever possible, avoid people having to wait on the street for outreach teams to find them.

If using communal accommodation, open services late afternoon/early evening to provide more time for booking in, risk assessment and support work. If possible, complete booking in processes with people earlier in the day, to reduce delays and frustrations at night. Later check-out times, with links/transport to move-on accommodation or other services, increase your opportunities to engage people with support, as well as reducing the risk of disruption to the neighbourhood if groups leave without anywhere to go. Anti-social behaviour could affect planning permission for future provision, so attention should be given to how the service will manage the times when people are entering and exiting the building, and work out how to minimise any negative impact on neighbours.

While policies and procedures should be in place, try to be flexible – it can be difficult for people sleeping on the streets to follow procedures, especially if it means travelling to appointments at fixed times. Staff should make decisions based on assessment of need and risk, with prevention of harm as a priority.

Top tips:

- ✓ Don't forget the practicalities: catering, bedding, laundry etc
- ✓ Introduce daytime booking in slots so that staff can fully assess and explain how the service will work
- ✓ Stay open until Monday to improve coordination with other support services
- ✓ Fund travel between rural and urban areas to encourage take-up of provision at a distance

Support and move-on

Most of the individuals accessing SWEP/winter provision will have additional support needs as well as their immediate need for shelter. Accommodation should be linked to support, either on-site or via a partner agency. If traditional night shelter provision is to be used, shelter providers should link and coordinate with agencies that are there to support people during the day.

Support might include access to move-on accommodation, healthcare, education, employment, substance use services, benefits advice, immigration advice and creative/leisure activities. It is good practice to listen to what the individual themselves wants and to recognise and build on their strengths as part of working collaboratively to solve immediate problems. SWEP/winter provision often provides an opportunity to engage individuals who have been reluctant to accept support in the past, or people who are new to the streets, where a connection with services can avoid their situation getting worse. Support should be provided by experienced staff with a range of flexible options offered.

While individuals should always be encouraged to accept the support that is provided, this should not be a condition of accessing accommodation. Some people may not feel ready to accept support, or the support offer might not be right for them, and this should be respected. The priority is to reduce the risk of immediate harm in severe weather. Continue to offer support over time, as people may become ready for change later on.

In the past we have encouraged LAs to make available day time provision for individuals who are being housed in accommodation options that are not accessible during the day. We would hope, given the guidance above, that the need for this will be limited this year due to the increased use of self-contained housing options.

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If provision which is not accessible during the day will still be used, then it is recommended that the following also apply:

- Shelter should be provided to people during the daytime to manage health risks related to the cold weather
- Review and map existing day services and their opening times, as well as identifying any services that could extend their SWEP into daytime

Top tips:

- ✓ Outreach staff with lived experience of homelessness can be successful at engaging people normally described 'hard to reach'
- ✓ Employ staff and volunteers who speak the same languages as people using SWEP
- ✓ Bring in staff from other services to engage people during SWEP
- ✓ Work with partner agencies to discuss and agree potential move-on options in advance of severe weather
- ✓ Recognising the complex issues people face, continue to offer housing and support even if a previous placement was unsuccessful
- ✓ If someone is asked to leave due to an incident, they are welcomed back the next night – no fixed exclusions
- ✓ Work with partners to provide a lead worker for people with the most complex needs, to build a strong relationship with the individual and navigate through services and systems that can be bewildering
- ✓ Aim for a co-ordinated approach and partnership between the council, rough sleeper outreach team, voluntary organisation, community health professionals and supported accommodation provider

Staffing and volunteers

Services need committed and trained teams who are able to work flexibly and who have a good knowledge of the homelessness sector. A combination of paid staff and volunteers often works best to respond to the unpredictable nature of SWEP and extended winter projects.

- Professional boundary training is essential for volunteers. Training should also cover areas such as safeguarding, effective communication and de-escalation of challenging behaviour, risk assessment, mental health, and drug and alcohol use. During Everyone In we created brief information webinars for people new to homelessness¹⁹ and a range of webinar recordings on different topics can be found in our resource library²⁰.
- Try to utilise volunteers' skills appropriately and offer a range of tasks according to levels of experience and skills. Tasks for less experienced/skilled volunteers could include cooking, cleaning, sorting out bedding, providing social and well-being activities
- If volunteers are to carry out any one-to-one support they should have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check²¹ which typically requires a longer lead-in time, but DBS checks won't be necessary for every volunteer

¹⁹ <https://www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/covid-19-guidance-forhotel-staff-volunteers>

²⁰ <https://www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/webinar-catchup>

²¹ <https://www.homeless.org.uk/dbs-checks-in-recruitment>

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- Actively recruit volunteers with lived experience of homelessness and consider diversifying your team (e.g. gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age, languages) to improve service provision
- Volunteers should not be put at risk. A clear induction, supervision and support pathway should be put in place so that they can raise concerns and develop their skills effectively. There should be simple protocols for responding to incidents, covering on-call access where experienced staff are not present, and contact details for external agencies

For more information on supporting volunteers please see our resources²².

People refusing shelter

Services regularly report difficulties in persuading some people to access accommodation²³, even during extremely cold weather. There are a range of reasons why people refuse and, ultimately, individuals with capacity may make choices that other people find hard to understand. At the same time, rough sleeping is a high risk situation and people might find it harder to make decisions if they are exhausted, hungry, afraid, in pain, intoxicated etc. So there is a balance to be struck between respecting the choices and autonomy of the individual, and continuing to make offers of support and checking on that person's welfare. Many services have experienced someone refusing a bed for years, until one day they are ready to access support. Change is always possible.

Outreach teams should be having regular conversations to understand people's reasons for refusal. Share information about the health risks associated with severe weather and highlight the increased risk for people using substances and for those whose health is already compromised. Ask what the right housing offer is to bring them indoors and see if this can be arranged.

If someone continues to refuse help during severe weather despite being at risk of, or already experiencing, harm, it may be grounds to engage statutory services such as emergency services and mental health teams. Understanding the Mental Capacity Act (MCA) and working closely and persistently with mental health services may be the right route to safeguard vulnerable people during severe weather²⁴.

Concerned that someone does not have capacity?

If you are concerned that a person does not have capacity to make the decision to accept SWEP in cold weather, the Mental Capacity Act may apply. The Mental Health Service Interventions toolkit²⁵ is designed to provide information about legislation, and step-by-step forms which can be completed to establish whether intervention can take place. It may be appropriate to use the MCA to frame the case for a Mental Health Act assessment or for emergency services to take the person to hospital if at risk (including if physically unwell or intoxicated).

People's ability to make decisions about accepting offers of housing may be impacted by needs such as autism²⁶ and brain injury²⁷ or speech, communication and language needs²⁸. Evidence suggests that there are higher rates of these needs in people experiencing homelessness. Homeless Link has published guidance about engaging and supporting individuals with these conditions.

²² www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/practical-guidance-on-managing-volunteers-in-homelessnessservices

²³ see [Understanding entrenched rough sleeping during COVID-19](#)

²⁴ www.homeless.org.uk/working-with-mental-health-services

²⁵ www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/guidance-on-mental-capacity-act

²⁶ <https://www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/autism-homelessness>

²⁷ <https://www.homeless.org.uk/brain-injury-and-homelessness>

²⁸ <https://www.homeless.org.uk/speech-language-and-communication-needs>

Top tips:

- ✓ Work with the Police as this can be helpful to assess risk where people are staying out in severe weather, especially in areas without an outreach team
- ✓ However, be aware that some people sleeping rough might not be happy about Police approaching them, so review this option on a case by case basis, and consider what alternatives are available
- ✓ Continue to monitor and support people who refuse to accept shelter through making frequent visits and providing resources and information
- ✓ Continue to encourage people to access SWEP facilities and try to accommodate different needs through providing a options for different cohorts and individuals
- ✓ Keep in mind that trauma, autism and brain injury can all impact how people engage with support offers
- ✓ Ensure agencies are aware of the Mental Capacity Act toolkit and when to use it
- ✓ Be transparent and upfront about all aspects of the provision so that individuals can make informed decisions, know what to expect and what is expected of them

Managing risk and creating a safe environment

The low threshold nature of SWEP/winter provision can increase risk across a number of areas, both for people using and delivering the service. Examples include people accessing unfamiliar facilities, people who are banned from services, people that you have little information about, or people who are reluctant to engage.

Brief individual safety plans should be completed, with the aim of identifying and managing risk, rather than as a basis for exclusion. Ask people about ways to help them manage/avoid risky behaviour and what might help them to stay safe and use the service appropriately. Focus on their skills and strengths – ask about past examples of successful engagement with housing and support. Consider any risk from others.

Where possible, brief and relevant information should be requested from an agency that knows the individual. Developing a working relationship with the Police can mean that checks are done quickly. If high risk is identified, this should not be seen as an automatic reason for exclusion, but as an opportunity to put measures in place to make the provision as safe as possible or to make an alternative plan, e.g. B&B instead of a room with shared facilities, joint support working etc. Staff skills and training can make a big difference in how a service manages risk, for example skills around boundaries, communication and trauma-informed approaches.

Think about escalating responses in your safety plans – ask the person what steps can reduce the risk, how staff/volunteers can help them to engage within the conditions and expectations of the project, and discuss what will happen next if the situation becomes unsafe for them/others. Speak to the Police about notifying them of incidents and exclusions, as they may be able to check on someone's welfare. Any decision to ask someone to leave during severe weather should be made carefully, with reasons recorded and reviewed at the earliest opportunity. Health and safety regulations around buildings and staffing should operate in line with standard procedures. Policies around controlled substances, alcohol use, working with vulnerable adults and offenders should be in place, clearly communicated and adhered to. Alcohol and substance misuse can be a key area of concern for services operating during severe weather and, while it should not be a barrier to support, suitable agencies with the experience and resources to respond should be involved in the delivery of the service.

Bear in mind that people who are alcohol dependent are at risk of alcohol withdrawal seizures, which can be fatal. Some services allow drinking, some ask for abstinence overnight but hold cans ready for when people wake up, while others have developed policies to allow controlled drinking in a designated area.

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It's important that people don't have to make a decision between the risk of severe weather and the risk of alcohol withdrawal. It might be helpful to focus on someone's behaviour when they arrive as the benchmark to assess risk, rather than having a blanket policy that assumes all alcohol use is unmanageable.

In some cases, people may be reluctant to accept a bed if their routine is to be very active at night (sometimes, but not always, related to their drug use). To reduce risks for these people, it might be that they are encouraged to come for a meal and to warm up even if they don't want a bed, or in shared space models they are able to use a sit-up service/reception room to come and go rather than having to bed down, without disturbing other guests. People who experience insomnia and heavy smokers might also appreciate these options.

Services can reduce the risk of challenging behaviour by creating a pleasant, comfortable and safe environment. Offering food, activities and entertainment, as well as training staff and volunteers to be welcoming and non-judgemental, can help people relax, interact positively with others and reduce feelings of unease, in turn reducing the likelihood of incidents of aggression.

Top tips:

- ✓ Inform individuals about any rules at referral and ensure communication is adapted to their needs
- ✓ Ongoing partnership work with agencies such as probation and police to discuss and assess risk factors
- ✓ Use local hotels or B&B where risks mean individuals can't be placed in rooms with shared or communal facilities
- ✓ Be flexible and willing to make exceptions in response to individual needs
- ✓ Help people to feel comfortable and safe e.g. referral agency accompanies each person to the accommodation, gives a tour and induction, helps them to settle in

Move on

Identify routes out of emergency provision into hostels, private rented, social housing, and specialist accommodation so that people do not have to return to the streets. As well as saving lives, SWEP and extended winter provision should support people off the streets for good.

LAs should be working with providers to remove barriers to move on, which may include ensuring people have homelessness assessments. Consider options for people who might struggle to find accommodation otherwise e.g. those assessed as having a high level of risk and/or vulnerability, those with restrictions due to immigration status, couples, or those with pets that they will not live without. Partnerships between support agencies, outreach teams and local authorities can facilitate getting clients into stable accommodation and where there is lower provision or demand, consider options for spot purchasing or joint commissioning. SWEP and extended winter provision can reduce or end rough sleeping – it is an emergency response with the potential to achieve much more.

Barnet Homes, Homeless Action in Barnet and Together in Barnet

Barnet Homes delivers the homeless and housing service on behalf of Barnet Council which includes providing rough sleeper support and accommodation services. They work closely with two local charities, Together in Barnet (TiB) and Homeless Action in Barnet (HAB), to deliver support to rough sleepers in the borough.

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The Barnet winter night shelter began in 2003 and TiB became a registered charity in 2014, offering Barnet's only emergency night shelter provision with just two employees and a coalition of interfaith volunteers from 32 multi-faith communities. They work alongside HAB; a day centre providing case work and practical services for people experiencing homelessness. Last winter, the pandemic meant that the revolving night shelter model provided by TiB closed and was replaced with a hotel model (with financial support from the Homelessness Winter Transformation Fund). When it closed at the end of May 2021, the good partnership working between TiB, HAB and Barnet Homes meant that none of the 16 residents returned to the streets.

This winter, TiB are once again working on a hotel model which is being fully supported by Barnet Homes and Public Health. This will offer people who are rough sleeping, emergency shelter in the form of single occupancy, en-suite hotel rooms and will include wrap-around support, working in partnership with the council and case workers from HAB. In addition, food and other practical support will be delivered by TiB's network of volunteers from the communities who support the night shelter.

Barnet Homes also works hard to get people off the streets and into a pathway. They also provide accommodation placements to rough sleepers during periods of severe weather, using existing TA providers for studios and rooms with shared facilities. They do not have a target number that restricts the number of SWEP placements and they follow an "In for good" principle; working with rough sleepers to access properties via PRS schemes so that no one has to return to rough sleeping.

They recognise that there is a need for alternative winter provision for those that will fall through the gaps in statutory provision or who choose to only engage with the voluntary sector. This season two new accommodation streams will have opened in Barnet; a short-term, intensive support 17-bed hub aimed at getting people off the streets as quickly as possible and facilitating move-on into more long-term accommodation. This may be PRS or a new 42-bed housing project which takes a 3-tier support approach to prepare people for independent living. Both projects will ensure that a large majority of the hotel guests will have a quick route out of the hotel.

For non-uk nationals who do not have settled immigration status or have limited access to public funds, move on options can be particularly challenging. Access to help and support from qualified advisers is critical. For more information about working with people who have restrictions due to immigration status (including asylum seekers) please see our other guidance and resources²⁹.

Top tips:

- ✓ Ensure everyone has a homeless assessment with the LA
- ✓ Engage immigration advice services for those who have restrictions due to immigration status
- ✓ Commit to finding move-on accommodation for all individuals before they are asked to leave
- ✓ Keep provision open until all placements have been made
- ✓ Consider how people can be supported around pre-tenancy education whilst they are accessing cold weather provision
- ✓ Work with partners to find rent deposits for hostel residents so that hostel spaces are freed up for severe weather clients
- ✓ Use starter tenancies and assistance via bond schemes for move on to suitable accommodation;

²⁹ <https://www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/non-uk-nationals>

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- ✓ Use dedicated staff to assess and support people to move on
- ✓ Make agreement for sharing needs and risk assessments to enable quick transfers from SWEP to permanent housing
- ✓ Take a flexible approach to providing temporary accommodation to people who would not be in priority need, if they express an interest and are willing to engage with support services
- ✓ Build trusted professional relationships with those who access SWEP; responding quickly and effectively to interest in move on accommodation

Further information and support

Please get in touch if you have any further questions or comments on this guidance, or wish to share intelligence or practice examples. Homeless Link will continue to share intelligence with policy makers so please do get in touch to let us know of any particular challenges your area is facing:

joanne.prestidge@homelesslink.org.uk or julie.cook@homelesslink.org.uk

Our Partnership Team work across England to support Homeless Link Members, local authorities and their partners to work together to end rough sleeping and homelessness. Find your Partnership Manager here:

<https://www.homeless.org.uk/about-us/our-people/meet-partnerships-team>



What we do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

Let's end homelessness together

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