

Severe Weather Responses 2016-17

Survey of winter provision for people sleeping rough

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Produced by
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Published
October 2017

Introduction

Purpose of this report

Following the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) and extended winter provision of 2016-2017, 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 and the support they received

In this report we outline the key findings from this survey. Challenges and good practice learned each year can be found in the related guidance: www.homeless.org.uk/swep

Definitions

- Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP): provision triggered by knowledge of three consecutive nights at zero or below (this is the minimum recommended requirement for provision – many local authorities operate more flexible criteria for SWEP activation).
- Extended winter provision: additional services provided over an agreed period of time e.g. every night from November to February.

Limitations of the data

We received responses representing 118 SWEP and extended winter provision services. Where two respondents returned results about the same SWEP, responses were merged. While this is a large number of services across England, it should be noted that we did not receive information from every service, and the results are based on a self-selecting sample of projects that responded.

To be included in next year's survey, please email tasmin.maitland@homelesslink.org.uk

Type of provision

We asked specific questions about the type of services that were provided during the winter of 2016-17. This section provides an overview of the findings.

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. 17 London services are represented this year compared to none in 2015-16.

Figure 1: regional breakdown of responses

Region	Number of responses	% of responses
South East	32	27
London	20	17
East of England	15	13
West Midlands	15	13
Yorkshire & Humber	13	11
North West	11	9
South West	6	5
East Midlands	3	3
North East	3	3
Total	118	100

Base: all respondents (118)

Type of provision (SWEP or extended winter provision)

Figure 2 shows that most (87%) of the services represented were identified as SWEP – this is a slight increase compared to the previous year when 84% of services were identified as being part of SWEP. The proportion of services identifying as ‘extended provision’ was similar to last year at one fifth (21%). ‘Other’ responses explained that the respondent was from, for example, a Housing Options service which provides SWEP options, a year-round Night Shelter (as opposed to a winter shelter) and one person stated they were an extended provision which would then be reactivated outside of the schedule opening period if the temperature dropped.

Figure 2: type of provision offered

Type of provision	Number of services	% Services
SWEP	103	87%
Extended winter provision	25	21%
Other	7	6%
Total	118	n/a

Base: All respondents (94). Respondents could select more than one option

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Figure 3 shows when respondents' services were available. All services represented gave an answer to this question. Just under four in ten (37%) of services opened when there was a forecast of three consecutive nights below freezing and a further quarter (25%) opened when there was a forecast of very bad weather conditions, regardless of the temperature or it being an extended period of bad weather. 18% of services stated that they open throughout the winter months. A fifth of respondents returned 'other' responses. Examples of 'other' were where services opened when there was one night as opposed to three nights of sub-zero temperatures forecast, where there was discretion on the part responsible officers according to weather conditions, where provision is available all year round or for a period which is not consistent with the November to March example provided in the question (for example one service opens from January only, another opens in bad weather but also opens between Christmas and New Year regardless of the weather).

Figure 3: when provision was open

Opening criteria	Number of services	% Services
Only when there was a forecast of 3 consecutive nights below freezing	44	37%
When there was a forecast of very cold, stormy or otherwise adverse weather	29	25%
Other (please specify)	24	20%
Open throughout winter months (e.g. Nov-March)	21	18%
Total	118	100%

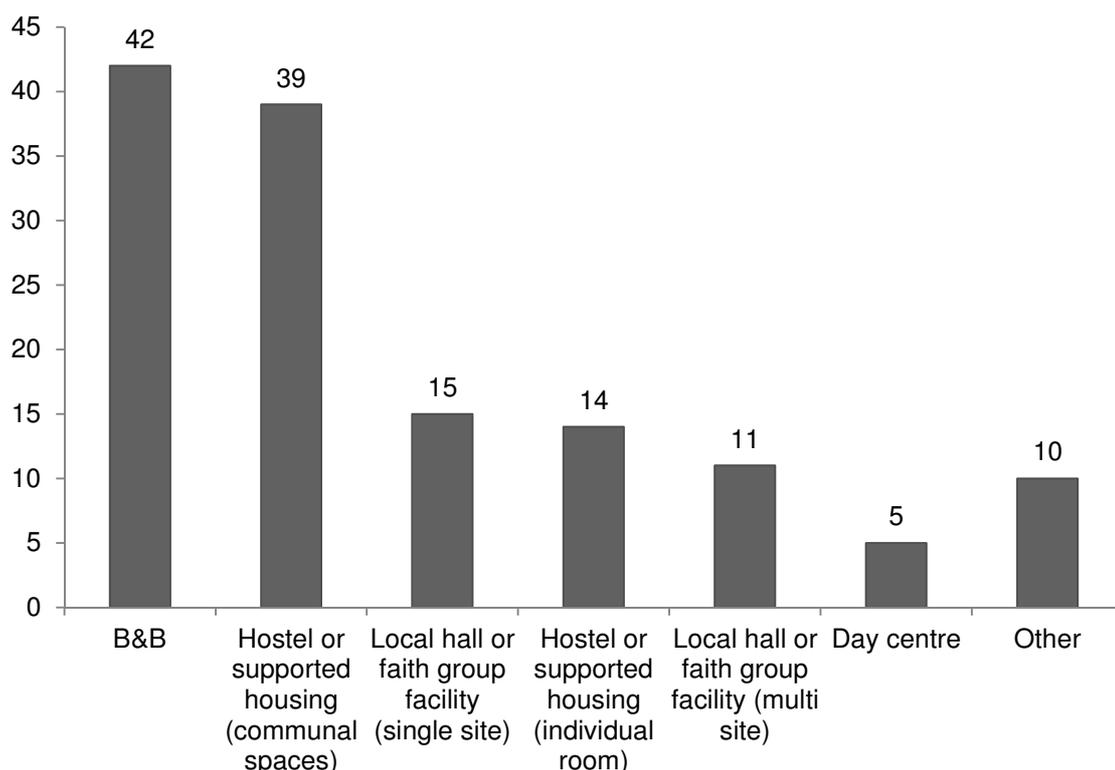
Base: All respondents (94)

Where accommodation was provided

Figure 4 shows the type of accommodation used for SWEP and extended winter provision in 2016-17 by survey respondents. Several services offered more than one type of accommodation. The figures do not relate to the number of bed spaces.

In line with the two previous years, the most commonly identified forms of accommodation were Bed & Breakfast and communal spaces within hostel and supported housing projects. However, this year bed and breakfast was the most commonly identified type of accommodation, whereas previously this had been communal space in existing projects. In 2015/16 over half of respondents said they used communal space within a hostel or supported housing project, whereas in this year's survey just under a quarter selected this option. This was not compensated for by any particular rise in other accommodation types; each respondent tended to selected fewer different types of accommodation this year. Provision classed as 'other' included units within the general housing stock e.g. 'pre-reserved flats within a council block' and 'two flats used as multiple occupancy - up to five persons in one and four in the other' and 'dispersed tenancies'. One person stated that space within a No Second Night Out project was used and another stated that they used temporary accommodation.

Figure 4: where accommodation was provided (number of services)



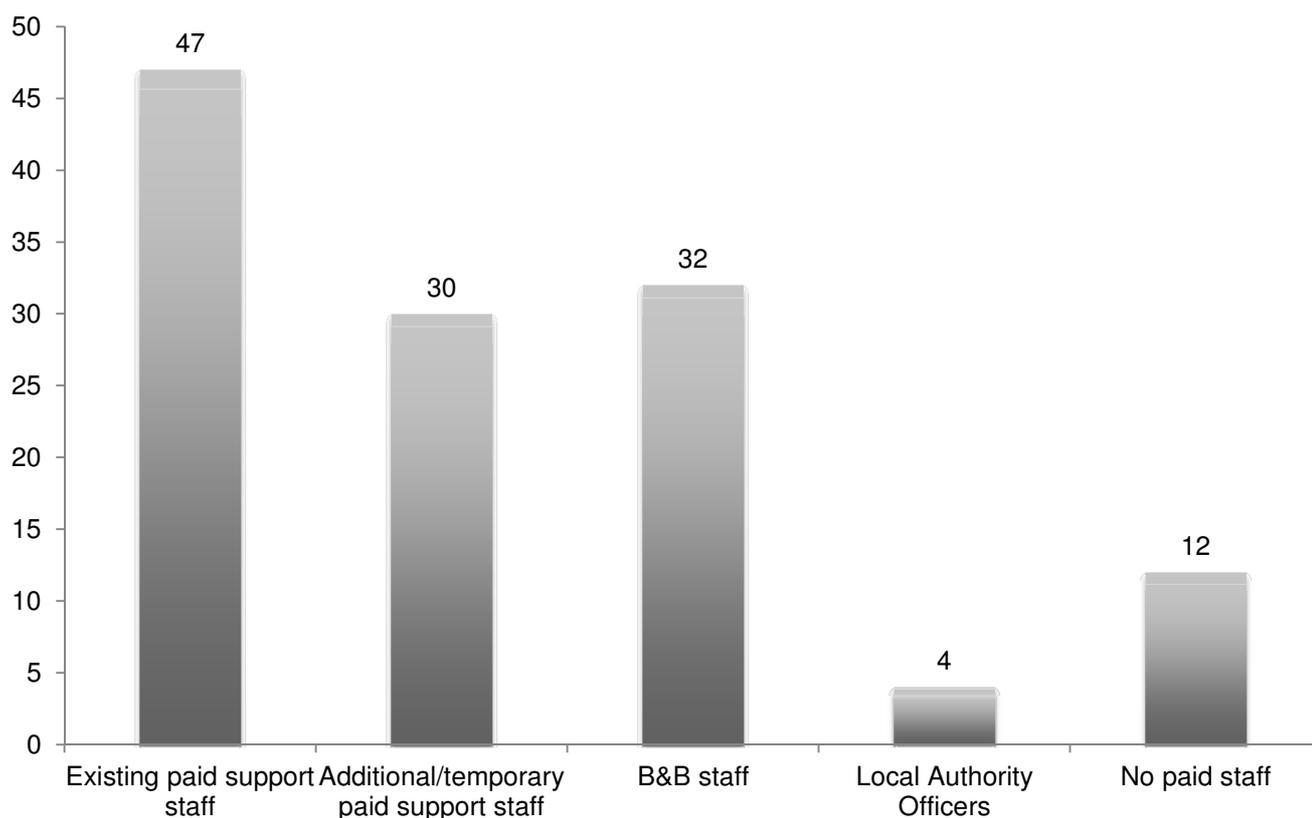
Base: All answering - 118 respondents

Location	Number of services identifying this type of location	% services
Bed and breakfast	42	23%
Hostel or supported housing (communal spaces)	39	22%
Local hall or faith group facility (single site)	15	8%
Hostel or supported housing (individual room)	14	8%
Local hall or faith group facility (multi-site)	11	6%
Day centre	5	3%
Other	21	12%
Total	118	n/a

Staffing

The most common staffing provision was through existing paid support staff (47 respondents (38%)). A quarter (25%) of respondents identified that additional paid/temporary staff assisted with provision in 2016-17 and almost the same proportion (27%) of provision was staffed fully or in part by employees of bed and breakfast provision. The proportionate contribution of bed and breakfast staff was up from 12% last year to 27% this year. There were few 'other' responses which could not be recoded into the main response options – examples were 'security guard' and 'outreach worker'.

Figure 5: staffing arrangements for provision (numbers of services using each type of staffing)



Source of staffing	Number of services identifying this type of staffing	% Services
Existing paid support staff	47	40%
Additional/temporary paid support staff	30	25%
B&B staff	32	27%
Local Authority Officers	4	3%
No paid staff	12	10%
Total	118	100%

Base: All answering - 118 respondents

Figure 6 shows that 35 (34%) of projects stated that they used volunteers, slightly up from 25% last year. Respondents were asked to provide details about the recruitment and training of volunteers. Common themes were that the shelter draw on a pool of existing skilled volunteers; that recruitment through church congregations and the internet, including Facebook, is successful; and that the opportunities are popular within the community. Some services stated that they would like to organise volunteer input earlier and embed this further in their work. Several services commented on their volunteer training, a common feature being homelessness awareness training and briefing on how the shelters operate. Two services mentioned that they had produced a training handbook to ensure consistency of volunteer training. Examples of open comments demonstrate the comprehensive approach of some services to volunteer training:

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“Training: As well as a Volunteer Briefing evening (attended by over 100 of the 400 volunteers), courses were provided in First Aid (10); Mental Health Awareness [2 different courses] (25 attended); The Art of Conversation (10 attended); and Personal Safety (20 attended).”

“We have a website which is kept up to date and we advertise/highlight training dates on there. We had training from Kent Police around handling challenging behaviours, spotting warning signs of anger and aggression etc. We also held in-house training on the way the shelter works, the volunteer role, boundaries, personal safety and ‘What should I do if ...’ These training sessions are designed to equip the new volunteers, refresh existing volunteers and give people the confidence to handle the different situations which may occur.”

“Free advertising in Wakefield Express newspaper. Posters in libraries, high schools, other churches, shops. [We are] welcoming and open about volunteering. Showing them round the premises and explaining how the Shelter is run and what is expected of volunteers and staff. Provided Mental Health Awareness, safeguarding, first aid, team leader, refresher and new volunteers. [We had] requests for more training on drug and alcohol awareness, what it's like to be homeless and benefits.”

Figure 6: use of volunteers

Did the service have volunteers assisting	Number of services identifying this type of staffing	% Services
Yes	35	34%
No	68	66%
Total	103	100%

Base: all answering – 103 respondents

Funding

Figure 7 below shows the different types of funding used by services. In line with last year, the most common source of funding for services responding was from the Homelessness Grant (54%). A fifth of services responding (19%) claim Housing Benefit for their severe weather provision (down from 29% last year). The proportion of services receiving some funding from private donations, e.g. individual donations and church groups, has increased to 14%. ‘Other’ responses included the local authority temporary accommodation budget (three people mentioned this), community safety funding (one person) or that SWEP provision is part of existing contracts, for example as part of contract for accommodation provision.

Of the 96 people who responded to this question, the vast majority (83%) said their funding has remained about the same since compared to 2015-16. 14% of people stated that they had seen an increase in funding and just one in twenty (5%) saw a decrease in funding when compared with the previous year.

Figure 7: funding of services

Funding method	No. services	% services
Homelessness Grant	53	54%
Other local authority funding	26	27%
Housing Benefit	19	19%
Charitable trusts/foundations	7	7%
Corporate funders	2	2%
Private donations e.g. private individuals and church groups	14	14%
Other	6	6%
Total	98	

Base: 118 (all answering)

Services worked with

Figure 8 shows the range of services that the respondents worked with for referral, support and move on. Over three quarters (77%) of those responding identified the Local Authority Housing Options team as an organisation they work with (up from 70% last year). The next most popular responses were hostels and street outreach (70%) and hostel and supported housing providers (67%). Just over four in ten (41%) of services worked with day centres and just over a fifth (22%) with soup runs and/or street pastors. There was a considerable increase in the number of organisations identifying that they work with health services – from a fifth (22%) last year to a third (36%) this year. A large number of ‘other’ responses were provided (35). Several respondents mentioned the police and mental health services, while others clarified the health services they work with in the comments box, for example stating that they work with GP services.

Figure 8: services worked with

Type of partner service	No. services	% services
Local Authority Housing Options Team	71	77%
Street outreach	64	70%
Hostel or Supported Housing	62	67%
Day centre	39	42%
Other comments	35	38%
Health services	33	36%
Advice centres e.g. Citizen's Advice, law centres	31	34%
Soup Run and / or Street Pastor	30	33%
Home Office e.g. Immigration Compliance Enforcement	8	9%
Not applicable - provision was part of a larger organisation with in-house expertise	5	5%

Trends, challenges and good practice

Trends observed

Respondents were asked to comment on any trends (for example common issues reported by service users) they noticed in delivering provision in 2016-17. The strongest theme in comments was an increase or the prevalence of people with high levels of support needs and/or with complex needs (this usually means a combination of needs or a support need which is challenging to address within current service provision). 11 people mentioned this specifically. Substance misuse was the most commonly mentioned support need within this, including peoples reticence to access cold weather provision if they are supporting an active drug habit (for example through begging in the evenings). Non-engagement and people failing to attend after securing a bed space were issues mentioned by several respondents. In Chichester a rise in rough sleeping did not see a corresponding rise in take up of SWEP, suggesting more people who do not wish to access SWEP.

One respondent observed an increase in issues relating to use of legal highs this year whereas two said this issue was less prevalent in 2016-17 than in 2015-16.

Issues relating to risk and behaviour were also frequently raised, for example aggression towards staff or damage to property. One respondent cited difficulties including potential mixed messages, with SWEP provision being based in hostel accommodation that some SWEP guests had previously been excluded from. Another explained that, on occasion, people with complex needs had secured but then lost accommodation within during the winter period:

“Repeat clients gained and then lost hostel accommodation between the start and end date of SWEP - complex needs.”

Mental health needs were commonly mentioned, one service commented that three guests were detained under the Mental Health Act and there were others with unmet or poorly met needs in this area.

In three areas the respondent noted an increase in female guests.

Access to PRS was an issue mentioned by several respondents in comments about trends, but in varying ways: one person gave the example of recently released prisoners who were unable to access PRS on Local Housing Allowance, ending up rough sleeping; one person cited lack of access to accommodation for people under 35 who are reluctant to share; another made a general comment about accessibility of the PRS; and another commented on the expectations of both clients and landlords.

“We struggled to house people through PRS, even though that was a central focus for us this year. The issue isn't that much the lack of available housing, but managing both peoples' and landlords' expectations, and high additional support that people need when moving into private accommodation.”

Challenges

Respondents were asked to comment on challenges they faced during the delivery of the service in 2016-17. Themes in responses were:

- Difficulty in identifying move-on routes for people accessing provision
- The complex needs of clients and ensuring a safe and appropriate environment with limited resources
- Lack of engagement from some people who did not want to access provision despite poor weather

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- People not turning up when they had accepted a place and, conversely, people turning up when they had not been referred/allocated a space
- The unpredictability of the weather meaning that SWEP was, on occasion, not activated when conditions were poor and, conversely, that SWEP was activated when weather was then milder than expected
- Challenges of offering services to those who speak little English
- Costs of and/or lack of transport options to provision being a barrier to people accessing the service.

The following quotes highlights themes describe above:

"[Challenges included] dealing with a couple of guests (one with a catheter) who were discharged from hospital straight into a shelter; partly pressure on hospital beds, but mostly due to a lack of understanding by the hospital discharge team and/or social workers about what we could provide and the limited number of beds available. We will try to address this next winter by going and talking with them. [Also] on-going lack of resources in our local Mental Health teams meant several guests with fairly severe mental health problems had to be turned away and had nowhere to go."

"A third of users were eastern European and had little or no understanding of English, with the majority having serious issues with alcohol abuse. The remaining users from the UK had serious problems with one or more of the following: drug abuse, alcoholism and mental health. There was often tension between both groups which could be difficult to manage."

"Chaotic nature of client group has increased with more substance misuse issues and harder to work with. We are looking at how to deliver the project in the future so we can include more complex cases."

Good practice

Respondents were asked to comment on things that they felt had gone well with provision in 2016-17 and of areas of good practice they identified in their projects.

Themes in responses were:

- Working in partnership, especially working with Housing Options and Outreach teams. Where Housing Options services were very well linked with provision this enabled quick assessment, move-on into temporary accommodation as appropriate and in one case on-site housing options advice from a local authority officer once a week.
- A shared goal of helping avoid harm to rough sleepers in the winter months and flexibility in meeting this across agencies, for example someone cited that, when kitchen provision was not available at a site, a partner agency provided a meal for people.
- Emergency winter provision acting as a route into services, for example where people accessing SWEP provision experience positive support and consider engaging with services outside of the SWEP
- Use of staffed hostel accommodation for emergency bed spaces, enabling guests to then access support during the day and link in with other services
- A well-publicised service utilising the internet and the community to identify people at risk of rough sleeping
- Well-structured referral processes
- The input of volunteers.

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Some comments illustrating the above:

"[What worked well?] The work of the faith groups, making them a meal and offering to chat and listen to the customers."

"We ended up with new procedure which meant that priority went to those actually found sleeping rough at the time, and not to all those on the list that were assumed to be sofa surfing as not found on outreach. Our outreach teams were very proactive."

"Housing officers attending places as advised by StreetLink gained relationships with surrounding venues, coffee shops, hair dressers etc leaving calling cards so if they see any one street homeless during the cold period to call and officers attended next day."

These short case studies from one service illustrate the impact of provision on individuals:

"A homeless gentleman with brain injuries had been abandoned by his court appointee to live on the streets. An investigation by the shelter led to the appointee being removed and DWP investigating a potential fraud. His financial affairs were safeguarded and accommodation found for him. He is now being supported by one of our befrienders and he will soon be getting an assessment by social services."

A young lady became a guest in the shelter. Mediation enabled her to return to her family and the shelter was able to facilitate her gaining employment with a local solicitor's firm.

A long-term alcoholic was placed in a residential rehabilitation unit outside the borough and is now entering his second month of treatment."

Clients accessing the service

Numbers of clients

In table 9 below we show the number of clients reported as using SWEP and extended winter provision in 2016-17 by our survey respondents. 60 respondents provided data on client numbers for 86 services, accounting for 2,793 people accessing provision during the 2016/17 period (this compared with last year: 60 services responding accounted for 1,835 clients).

Note that this data does not show the total number of people in the different regions who used provision, just the number reported to us by our survey respondents.

Figure 9: overall number of clients accommodated by the services responding

Region	Number of services with this data	Number of clients represented
South West	3	163
North West	4	92
Yorkshire & the Humber	12	485
West Midlands	11	506
East Midlands	3	57

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North East	2	31
East of England	11	472
South East	29	662
London	11	325
Total	86	2,793

Who is accessing support?

In our survey, we asked respondents to comment on some specific client groups of interest: women, those under 25 years old, EU migrants, migrants from other parts of the world and those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF). The number of people in these groups is relevant to the planning and provision of services – for example highlighting that there was a proportion of people with NRPF for whom Housing Benefit could not be claimed. The number of services providing data on each of these questions varies so in figure 10 a ‘base number’ is shown for each client group.

432 women stayed in the shelters responding to this question, representing 15% of their client group overall. 319 clients were identified as being EU migrants (12%), and an additional 8% were migrants from outside of the EU. Overall, 10% of those included had NRPF which would mean that Housing Benefit could not be claimed for their bed space. Just over one in ten (12%) of clients represented were under 25 years old.

The variation with last year’s results was 3% or less for each special interest group.

Figure 10: profile of clients accommodated by groups of interest

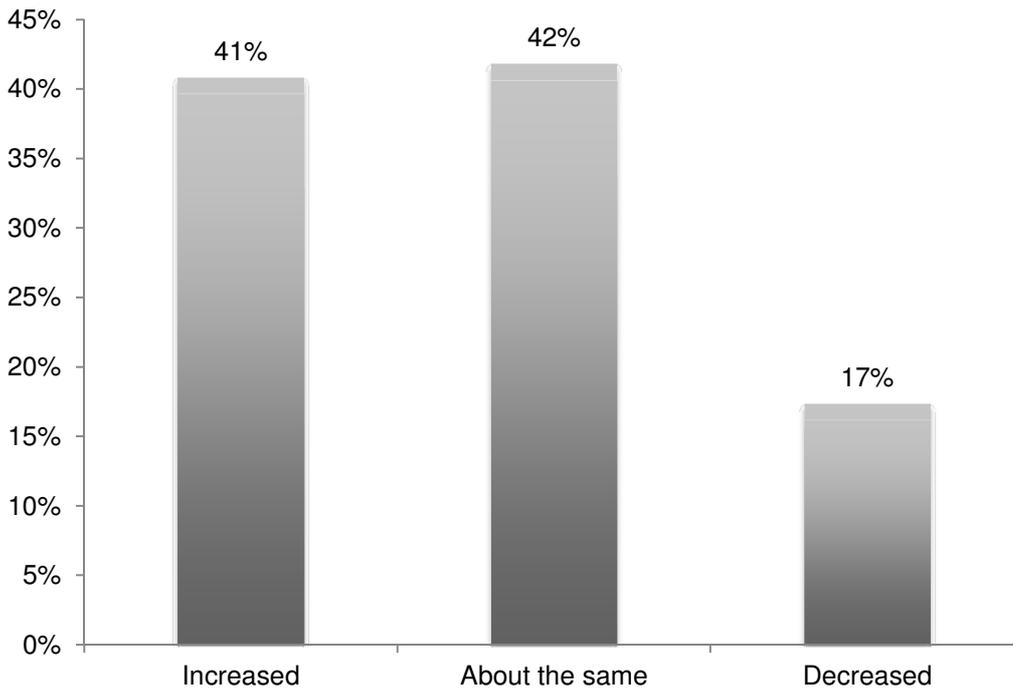
Client group	Number of this group identified	Overall number of clients for those services providing data about this group	Percentage of clients identified as being in this group amongst all those answering	Base (number of services responding)
Women	432	2793	15%	86
Under 25 year olds	319	2708	12%	84
EU migrants	362	2777	13%	86
Migrants – non EU	196	2421	8%	83
People with NRPF	269	2793	10%	86

Level of demand

Respondents were asked how the demand for services in 2016/17 compared with the previous year. Of the 98 services who responded, four in ten respondents (41%) said demand had increased, a similar proportion said it was about the same (42%) and 17% said there had been a decrease in demand compared to the previous year.

Comments on demand included one person who said that overall demand was up, but demand amongst EU nationals was reduced; that there was better weather which reduced demand; and that demand was increased as a reflection of an increase in rough sleeping and services for rough sleepers in the local area.

Figure 11: level of demand compared to previous year (percentage of services reporting)



Base: all answering, 98 respondents

People turned away

We asked survey respondents whether they had to turn any individuals away over the winter. Out of 103 who responded 74 (72%) said they did not turn anyone away, while 29 (28%) turned at least one person away.

26 services specified how many people they had had to turn away. 13 services turned away one to three people, ten turned away ten people and two turned away 11-20 people.

This data has limitations: one respondent pointed out that when the service is full, referring agencies are informed and do not send new referrals through; it may be that demand information does not always reach the shelters themselves. This is more likely to be the case for Winter Shelters than for SWEPS, where provision is usually made for everyone willing to come inside in precarious weather conditions.

Figure 12: people turned away

Number of people turned away	Number of services
One to three people	13
Four to ten people	10
11 – 20 people	2

Reasons given for having to turn people away were not having enough bed spaces (10 services), one or more clients being assessed as too high risk to accommodate in this setting (20 services), the service not being able to meet the clients' needs (seven services), and practical issues such as not being able to accommodate a dog (six services).

Outcomes from SWEP and winter provision

86 services provided a figure for the number of people they accommodated in 2016-17. The total was 2,793 people. Services were asked to identify numbers of people they knew went on to more stable accommodation from the SWEP and the number who returned to the streets. In total, across 86 services responding, 735 people were known to have moved on from the SWEP/extended winter provision to more stable accommodation and 829 were known to have returned to the streets. Overall this represents a fairly even split between clients who moved to more settled accommodation (26%) and clients who returned to the streets (30%). Data on the outcome of the shelter stay was not provided for just under half (46%) of those identified as staying in the shelters. Figures should be treated with some caution as different services may apply different ways of monitoring these outcomes – for example, some may assume a return to the street for those who did not access settled accommodation, while others only record a return to the street if this is confirmed with subsequent contact.

Figure 13: Outcomes from SWEP

	No. services	No. clients	No. moved to more settled accommodation	% moved to more settled accommodation	No. returned to the streets	% returned to the streets	% unaccounted for
100+ clients	6	972	177	18%	259	27%	55%
50-99 clients	12	824	224	27%	137	17%	56%
30-49 clients	10	375	118	31%	121	32%	36%
20-29 clients	10	235	87	37%	114	49%	14%
10-19 clients	16	249	72	29%	136	55%	16%
Less than 10	32	138	57	41%	62	45%	14%
Total	86	2793	735	26%	829	30%	46%

Resources

Guidance on Severe Weather Emergency Protocol and Extended Weather Provision

www.homeless.org.uk/swep

Housing Justice Shelter Quality Mark

www.housingjustice.org.uk/housing-justice-quality-mark

For further information on this report please contact: tasmin.maitland@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.