



# Hot Weather SWEP

Case studies of local responses

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## Case Studies of local responses during the heatwave in July 2022

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## Introduction

The UK experienced an extreme heatwave in July 2022, with multiple areas in the UK exceeding temperatures of 40°C for the first time in history. As a result, the Met Office issued its first red warning for extreme heat along with a Level 4 alert, with the government declaring a national emergency. A red warning means adverse health effects are expected not just to those most vulnerable.<sup>1</sup>

During this heatwave, in many areas across the UK, SWEP was activated to provide support to people experiencing homelessness. With those sleeping rough being more vulnerable due to underlying health conditions and the lack of ability to keep cool, local provisions had to act fast to support these individuals.

This briefing contains case studies from organisations who provided essential services to people experiencing homelessness during the severe hot weather.

If you have additional good practice case studies that could be added to this document, please contact: [joanna.turner@homelesslink.org.uk](mailto:joanna.turner@homelesslink.org.uk)

## Case Study: Providence Row (East London)

### The local issue:

- On the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> July 2022, temperatures soared across the UK, hitting 40 degrees in some areas of London.
- A red extreme heat warning was issued for the first time by the Met Office, meaning that risk to life was *likely*.
- Individuals rough sleeping were at risk of developing heat stroke due to being unable to access shaded cool areas, cold water or showers.
- Due to the nature of rough sleeping, these individuals were more at risk during the heat wave due to underlying health conditions.

### Steps taken to address it:

- As a result of this extreme heat, Providence Row's Resource Centre was asked by Tower Hamlets local authority to set up a 'Cooling Station' for vulnerable rough sleepers.
- The Resource Centre remained open from 8.30am until 11pm (usual closing time is 4.30pm) across the 2 days so that individuals could have somewhere to shelter and have a means of cooling down through access to cold showers, ice-lollies, and drinking water.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/binaries/content/assets/metofficegovuk/pdf/weather/learn-about/uk-past-events/interesting/2022/2022\\_03\\_july\\_heatwave.pdf](https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/binaries/content/assets/metofficegovuk/pdf/weather/learn-about/uk-past-events/interesting/2022/2022_03_july_heatwave.pdf)

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- Tower Hamlets and the City of London Street Outreach Teams were informed that they could bring individuals to access the 'Cooling Station', and people could also self-refer into the provision.
- Across these 2 days, gazebos were set up in the courtyard of the Resource Centre to provide adequate shade to those accessing the service.
- All staff were encouraged to give out cold bottles of water and sun cream to individuals.
- Regular welfare checks were conducted to check for any signs of heat exhaustion/stroke.
- The RESET Drug and Alcohol Outreach Team as well as the Tower Hamlets Street Outreach Team conducted regular outreach shifts across these 2 days to check on individuals who were rough sleeping, to encourage them to hydrate and get into the shade where possible.
- Due to the Resource Centre needing to remain open until 11pm, 2 security guards were booked to give support during these evenings, with an additional 2 Providence Row staff staying until 11pm.
- Security staff were given a full handover and briefing document regarding the SWEP Procedure and what to look out for in terms of heat exhaustion.
- Security and Providence Row staff were provided with a handover template to track which individuals accessed the Cooling Station, along with a document to log any incidents which occurred.
- Security staff were also provided with Naloxone training in the event of an overdose incident.
- During the evening, those accessing the Cooling Station were provided with an evening meal, cold drinking water and access to a cold shower.

### **Outcomes:**

- Individuals who were rough sleeping were provided with a safe and cool space during SWEP to protect themselves from the extreme heat, reducing the chance of heat exhaustion/stroke.
- By providing extended opening hours at the Resource Centre, staff were able to engage with individuals further surrounding their rough sleeping and connect them with services.
- In terms of numbers, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of July, 40 individuals accessed the Providence Row Resource Centre during the day, and 13 accessed the 'Cooling Station' provision from 4.30pm onwards.
- On the 19<sup>th</sup> of July, 36 individuals accessed the Resource Centre during the day, and 25 accessed during the evening.
- Across these 2 days:
  - 300 bottles of water were given out
  - 319 sachets of sun cream were distributed

- 40 meal bags were given to clients accessing the 'Cooling Station' after 4.30pm.

### **Learning for improvements:**

- As this was the first time the Met Office had issued a red extreme heat warning and therefore, the first time Providence Row had been asked to set up a 'Cooling Station', no prior planning had taken place for this provision.
- As a result, guidance surrounding looking out for signs of heat stroke/exhaustion had to be created immediately by staff members and the logistics of keeping the Resource Centre open till 11pm had to be organised on the day.
- Another challenge was ensuring those that needed the service benefited from it – ensuring that communication was clear with the street outreach teams, local enforcement officers and other homeless services in the area that the provision was available.
- Moving into next summer, clearer guidance on how to support rough sleepers in extreme heat will be needed.

## **Case Study: HARP (Southend)**

### **The local issue:**

- In July 2022, SWEP was activated due to extremely high temperatures across England.
- Local Councils, outreach teams and charitable organisations all had to respond quickly during this heatwave to ensure that those sleeping rough did not suffer.
- For those individuals without shelter, there were concerns over their health given the risk of heat exhaustion/heat stroke.

### **Steps taken to address it:**

- HARP's outreach team responded to concerns about the increasingly high temperatures by going out in the early hours of the morning on the 3 consecutive days preceding the severe weather alert to locate those sleeping rough and therefore, likely to be in the sun throughout the day.
- By working in partnership with Southend-on-Sea City Council, HARP's outreach team were able to place these individuals into emergency accommodation.
- For those individuals who did not wish to take up the offer of emergency accommodation and insisted on remaining outside, the outreach team were able to provide them with sun cream, water, and hats to help manage the weather conditions.
- A wider co-ordinated approach involving other community groups (One Love and SVP) allowed access to individuals that may not have engaged with HARP directly, enabling more people to be supported.

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- HARP's outreach team also worked in partnership with the Rough Sleeper Mental Health Team and an NHS Advanced Nurse Practitioner to ensure that those who were placed in emergency accommodation could have their health needs addressed.

### Outcomes:

- The outreach team were able to place 25 individuals into emergency accommodation during the heatwave.
- As a result of being in accommodation, a number of individuals were able to access physical and mental health support through partnership working.
- For a large proportion of those that utilised the emergency accommodation provision, HARP were able to maintain engagement and produce longer-term housing outcomes; something that would have been more difficult if the individuals had remained on the street.
- In a number of cases, those supported were individuals that, for a number of reasons, HARP's outreach team had struggled to work with in the past. This offer of accommodation provided an opportunity to build trust and complete the necessary follow up work surrounding areas like access to funds or being able to clearly establish the individual's support needs.
- Working collaboratively with not only Southend-on-Sea City Council, but also Community Groups, broadened HARP's reach in terms of individuals who were able to be accommodated, building more trust with those accessing services.

### Learning for improvements:

- Due to the nature of SWEP, HARP's process for targeting rough sleepers during the heatwave had to be very reactive, rather than planned.
- Working efficiently with all partnership services was difficult to coordinate last minute.
- In the future, it would be useful to have a SWEP/extreme weather group involving all relevant services in the area which could meet regularly during times of potential severe or extreme weather to maintain and update possible action plans should SWEP be activated.

## HARP Good Practice Case Study

*"During the hot weather SWEP activation, we supported an individual with multiple complex needs into accommodation. This individual had recently been evicted from mental health supported housing due to anti-social behaviour, and had therefore fallen into rough sleeping. When SWEP was activated, we were able to obtain emergency accommodation for this individual, but it was clear that he needed wrap around support from a variety of external agencies and therefore, needed to be placed into appropriate housing once SWEP had been deactivated. Due to fears in regard to further accommodation for this individual, we spoke with Southend-on-Sea City Council and expressed concerns regarding their mental health and*

*vulnerability. As staff from the council were present at the SWEP accommodation, this allowed them to speak directly to the individual, and after advocating for this individual, it was agreed that they would be placed into further temporary accommodation following the SWEP placement. However, the individual was evicted from the temporary accommodation due to anti-social behaviour and drug use, and then evicted from four other temporary accommodation placements. It was clear that this individual needed to be in appropriate supported housing so we worked with mental health nurses and the council to ensure the right support was in place. This individual is now in complex needs supported accommodation and engaging with services.”*

## Case Study: Rapid Response Outreach (Pan-London)

### The local issue:

- The heatwave in July 2022 meant that SWEP was activated to ensure that those sleeping rough had the means to keep cool during the hot weather period.
- The Rapid Response Outreach team, a night-time pan-London service had to act quickly to safeguard those at risk on the streets.

### Steps taken to address it:

- The Rapid Response Outreach Team was provided with advice from the Greater London Authority and advice was sought locally from each borough of operation.
- This guidance was then passed onto frontline workers and updated throughout the SWEP period.
- Working in partnership with different local authorities enabled workers to get information about resources across London. For example, Hillingdon Local Authority provided a list of local spaces where people sleeping rough could access. Moreover, the [Cool Spaces website](#) was used by outreach workers to advise people found in local areas where they could seek shade and access drinking water.
- No Second Night Out (NSNO) relaxed their eligibility criteria during the hot weather period and some assessment hubs operated as places of respite during the hottest parts of the day.
- Workers from the Rapid Response Outreach team offered all people found drinking water and sunscreen and were able to access local accommodation options, as well as respite areas.

### Outcomes:

- The team saw a 28% increase on the previous week's referrals and recorded 93 street contacts during the week of the heatwave.
- 35 NSNO appointments were made (2 of whom would have been previously ineligible).

- 6 people were placed into local accommodation provision (4 through emergency (SWEP) processes, outside of normal practice).

### **Learning for improvements:**

- Due to the nature of the Rapid Response Team being a night-time service, feedback from the outreach workers identified that making offers of accommodation to people at night was more difficult, due to the cooler weather in the evening.
- Individuals who were rough sleeping were more receptive to local authority offers of 'cool spaces' in local areas (libraries etc.), rather than travelling to NSNO hubs far out of the borough, with an unclear offer of respite or accommodation.
- Communications in general were unclear across different areas of London, creating some confusion about what was available and how it could be accessed. Routes off the street had to be attempted/organised on an ad-hoc basis by workers.

## **Case Study: Oasis Community Housing (North East)**

### **The local issue:**

- The extreme heat across England during the summer meant there was cause for concern for individual's health, especially for those who were rough sleeping.
- Oasis Community Housing's outreach, drop-in centre and accommodation teams had to react quickly to ensure individuals who were on the street, as well as in supported accommodation, had the means to keep cool and hydrated.

### **Steps taken to address it:**

- Working alongside the local council, staff from Oasis Community Housing provided bottled water to hand out in their emergency accommodation project, as well as to rough sleepers during outreach shifts.
- Staff ensured they were discussing the weather with individuals accessing the drop-in centres, encouraging them to use sun cream and drink plenty of water.
- Water and sun cream was taken to the council office in South Tyneside for those presenting as homeless.
- Staff from Oasis Community Housing's 'Basis Beds' accommodation contacted all residents to offer an electric fan and bottled water. All properties in a high-rise building were provided with fans as these properties were extremely difficult to cool due to the construction of the building and lack of air flow.
- As a team, staff discussed the signs and symptoms of heat stroke and dehydration, so they were aware of what to look for. This was also shared with individuals accessing services.



### Outcomes:

- Individuals who were supported during the heatwave were very grateful for the ability to stay cool and hydrated during this time, especially as many had underlying health issues, making it a priority for them to not over-heat.
- Residents in the accommodation projects were able to keep cool and comfortable, with no adverse health problems occurring due to the heatwave.
- Individuals who were rough sleeping were able to keep hydrated, cool and protected against the sun whilst accessing the drop-in services.

### Learning for improvements:

- Although Oasis Community Housing were used to providing additional support during cold weather, staff hadn't experienced a summer which was so hot, so the response had to be rapid to safeguard individuals.
- Many individuals using the services did not understand the risks associated with the hot weather, so it was important that all staff had the knowledge to disseminate.
- Providing fans to residents in the accommodation projects was a challenge as it was time consuming for staff to support residents to build their fans. Staff had to work together to assemble the fans and test them regularly to ensure they worked correctly.

## Oasis Community Housing Good Practice Case Study

*"During the heatwave, our outreach team came across an individual on the street who was directly in the sun, with many layers on, and was drinking heavily. We were concerned about him over-heating and the risk of dehydration and shared our concerns with the individual. He told us that he didn't want to show his arms due to scars and abscesses and didn't have any clothing with sleeves besides a coat. Our team were able to purchase him a long-sleeved, light weight top so that he could be cooler, but also felt comfortable. It was important for us to ensure he knew the importance of self-care during this hot weather; something that may not have been his priority at the time, but could be lifesaving."*

## 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.

## Homeless Link

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