

Severe Weather (SWEP) and Extended Winter Provision

Case studies

Let's end homelessness together

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Case studies

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Produced by

The National Practice Development Team

Acknowledgements

With thanks to MHCLG and all the Local Authorities and voluntary sector providers who shared their learning

Published

October 2018

Please note: These case studies were produced in 2018, and as such, do not reflect the current best practice of providing single room emergency provision. However, as some of the information contained may still be useful, we have not removed these from our website, and will look to replace them with more recent examples over the coming year.

If you deliver or commission SWEP or winter provision and would like to share a case study with us, please email: joanna.turner@homelesslink.org.uk

Introduction

This document is an additional resource to Homeless Link's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) and Winter Provision Toolkit. It collates some of the good practice case studies from recent years. We'd like to thank the Local Authorities and voluntary, community and faith sector providers who shared their data and learning.

Exceptional SWEP – responding to urgent increased need

Westminster City Council (2018)

Westminster City Council's SWEP standard provision is already extensive, with up to 100 bed spaces available across the night centre and hostels. Typically, only a quarter of this capacity is used, with people often reluctant to access emergency provision at a distance from their usual location or to move in to a shelter for only one or two nights.

As February's exceptionally severe weather took hold, Westminster responded with 11 days of continuous SWEP, extending provision to around 250 spaces, with a commitment to continue extending in order to provide additional overnight shelter to anyone who needed it. This capacity was achieved through partnership working across multiple agencies – outreach teams, hostels, day centres, faith and community groups. Commissioned and non-commissioned services coordinated to open bed spaces, manage referrals, transport people to shelter, and provide support both overnight and during the day.

This response had an impact on wider service provision. The Connection at St Martins day centre switched to skeleton housing and advice services in order to focus on emergency response, opening 24 hours a day for five days. The Passage and West London Mission also altered their opening times and all three day centres (who are not funded by Westminster) collaborated to meet demand. Staff and volunteers agreed to change rotas and activities in order to cater for 'exceptional' SWEP.

Additional and vital support came from the Muslim Cultural Heritage Centre, which opened building space for overnight shelter, making adjustments to their local provision in order to accommodate SWEP. The contribution of faith groups – volunteers from churches and synagogues, as well as faith-based day centres – was a significant factor in sustaining the response.

Despite the freezing temperatures and repeated offers of shelter, about 70 people continued to refuse to access SWEP provision. Some remained on the streets, while others joined the 'Portlandia' squat.

Critical success factors

- 24-hour response
- Outreach teams starting shifts earlier, around 7pm – they found people's motivation to accept intervention tended to decline after midnight, so the evening period was vital, as an early evening contact increased the likelihood of someone accepting shelter by the end of the shift
- 6-8 outreach teams each night covering fixed patches so anyone sleeping out would be contacted
- Removing need for paperwork to get people into shelter quickly
- Establishing a 'control centre' as a single point of contact to coordinate referrals with available beds in multiple locations across the borough
- Transport to take people to the different shelters.
- Goodwill of non-commissioned agencies and volunteers to change rotas and alter provision
- Willingness of faith groups to offer buildings and volunteers, and call in support from their congregations e.g. food and clothing

Learning for future Exceptional SWEP

- Central coordination needs to be stronger to give clarity on availability of spaces, matching referrals to spaces, transport, and closing shelters as they near capacity
- Referral and placement has to be strictly coordinated to safely manage risk, space and relationships with less experienced shelter providers.
- Using more central and familiar locations can reduce the number of people refusing to travel for shelter
- Some SWEP options in smaller centres may help those who are reluctant to use large shelters
- There is a role for an emergency referral/triage process (without creating unnecessary paperwork)
- Alternative referral routes are needed for people not on the streets e.g. sleeping on public transport
- Agencies who are not usually working in homelessness will need support/guidance around safeguarding, health and safety and risk for their volunteers
- A process is needed for call-outs to existing skilled volunteer pools e.g. Crisis at Christmas
- There is a need to transition people out of SWEP, especially if weather is no longer severe but still adverse
- Need for some kind of emergency funding to support such a large-scale response

Planning an extended service to meet SWEP demand

Exeter City Council (2018)

What led Exeter to commission the service?

As Homeless Strategy and Partnership Lead, I was very aware that our SWEP provisions were reliant on the goodwill of our partners. It was being delivered at great personal cost of staff involved, as there was often very little warning that the protocol was being activated and therefore very long shifts at short notice were required. I was also mindful of lost opportunity for engagement with a short turn-around shelter, as it often takes some of our people a few nights of sleep to open up to better dialogue.

Our first SafeSleep happened in 2015/16 after a meeting with BCHA and St Petrocks about the plans for the winter, when there was discussion about always opening for a minimum of a week when a shelter was needed. This quickly progressed to a "what if we did it all winter?" conversation. The local authority was lucky to have scope in a grant budget for accommodation projects and was able to finance a pilot. The first year saw a shelter set up between the two providers. It worked well and assisted a high number into accommodation. However, there were some areas that didn't work as well as we had all hoped:

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- There was significant impact on the residents of the BCHA hostel whose communal space was occupied as well as the users of the St Petrocks services as the space was cleared.
- The staffing numbers of the split project made it harder to manage clients with higher risk. This meant around 25% of those sleeping rough were unable to access it in risk grounds.
- By 2016, our new outreach service with Julian House had become established so an alternative model was explored, which offered an additional resource in the city.

At Exeter we are keen to innovate to find solutions for rough sleepers, but absolutely know we cannot do it alone. Therefore, the project has really grown through collaboration with partners to make a difference rather than an isolated decision to commission.

In 2016, the Council funded a Winter Night Shelter managed by Julian House which ran for 90 nights from December until March. During this time 141 different people used the accommodation with an average of 21 people using the provision each night. Unfortunately, we were unable to find an appropriate venue for 2017's Night Shelter. Instead we worked with BCHA (landlord of Gabriel House) to ensure that an additional 15 units of accommodation are made available and are exclusive for people rough sleeping on the streets of Exeter. The 'Emergency Bunks' ran for a period of 4 months, during this time 61 people accessed the Bunks with an additional 36 accessing the Severe Weather Provision. In total 31 people moved on to more stable accommodation. From April the Emergency Bunks project was able to continue and is now fully funded through Housing Benefit.

One of the main challenges over the last three years has been in finding a suitable venue to host our winter night shelter. Preparations started a lot earlier this year and we began to identify potential venues from March 2018. The MCHLG Rough Sleeping Initiative Fund also came at an opportune time and it enabled us to think more creatively about finding a longer term solution. Planning applications have already been submitted for a Winter Night Shelter: Option A was for a change of use of an existing building, a former pub and Indian restaurant, which would be used as a night shelter between 1 October and 31 March and as a 'Community Facility for the Homeless' during the spring and summer. Option B was for the temporary installation of a modular building on the Howell Road car park to be used as a night shelter between 1 October and 31 March.

SafeSleep will deliver an inclusive service from 1st October 2018 - 31st March 2019, accommodating up to 26 rough sleepers a night in supervised premises from 20:00 - 09:00 Monday to Friday and 19:00 - 12:00 weekends and bank holidays. The primary aim will be to prevent loss of life; also to reduce rough sleeping to as near as zero as possible; reduce anti-social behaviour; and assist 45 people to move into settled accommodation over a six month period.

This will be achieved by:

- A partnership approach between Julian House and BCHA to mobilise combined resources and appoint a joint team of volunteers and staff with knowledge and skills to work positively and flexibly with rough sleepers.
- Provide a comprehensive staff and volunteer induction to prepare for providing a safe, inclusive and psychologically informed service.
- Assessing, planning and enacting reconnections, single service offers and person-centred packages of support, which take an asset-based approach to assisting rough sleepers into appropriate services and accommodation (including assessment of people who might present during the night).

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- Repurposing the Assertive Homeless Outreach Team to deliver a minimum of 5 evening outreach sessions a week, to encourage client engagement with SafeSleep, while continuing to provide rural and morning outreach.
- Galvanising support from statutory services, clients, the public, businesses, soup kitchens, faith groups, Rapid Relief Team (charity offering catering support for emergency services) and wider community, to provide meaningful added value through donations, meals, volunteering, activities/group and client/peer involvement, ensuring a coordinated whole community response.
- Holding a service budget for reconnections and personal budgets to enhance client outcomes, and a small multi-agency fund to incentivise engagement from external agencies and/or mitigate the impact of SafeSleep on the surrounding community.

Buy-in from local members and community

We have great support from local members in tackling homelessness and a successful members' steering group for the Homelessness Strategy. This helped to underpin political support.

Rough sleeping gets a lot of press coverage in the area, including a clear public outcry at the concept of homeless encampments being included in PSPO proposals. Public support for the shelter was a key factor in progressing its creation last year. The local paper helped in the search for an appropriate venue and featured many of the providers' activities in the area to help people who are homeless.

Another angle that was used to gain support was the positive impact on the night time economy: concerns about begging and street sleeping having a negative impact on people's night out, their perceptions of safety, and impact on business income. The provision of, and publicity around, the shelter helped to disrupt begging in the city as there was awareness that there was somewhere homeless people could go of an evening, to have food and a safe place to sleep. This helped to identify people begging who had accommodation so that services could address their behaviour accordingly.

When a location was found and a planning application was needed, there was a high level of concern from neighbouring residents and businesses. We held a community meeting to introduce the management staff of the project and agree ASB and communication protocols. The planning committee were unanimously supportive of the temporary permission for the project.

There will always be challenge from the local community as people do not want a homeless shelter on their doorstep, all we can do is try to work with the local community to alleviate their concerns and to try to appeal to the wider public that if we are really serious about ending homelessness this can only happen with everyone playing their part.

How was it funded?

Through a combination of Council grant, partner contributions (Devon County Council & Community Safety Partnership) and Housing Benefit income. Housing Benefit payments covered around 40% of the costs due to the scale of the project.

The 2018 project will be largely funded through our Rough Sleeping Initiative bid with additional funding through grants and Housing Benefit.

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How the Council helped it to run effectively

One key element for us was the staffing of the project. Many of the workers also had jobs with partner agencies. For example, one was a part time drugs worker who was able to link in clients and use their skills to start conversations about substance misuse.

We held a weekly housing advice surgery there. This was invaluable in filtering out people who should have been provided statutory support but had not found their way to the Council.

We also provided some management support to help gain supplies or to help foster relations with partners and residents.

We are looking to be very ambitious with the 2018 project and will look to employ a housing caseworker to work 5 days a week alongside the staff at the night shelter. This is so that we can ensure that all clients have a Personal Housing Plan and that, as a Council, we are compliant with the Homelessness Reduction Act.

What we would have liked to do, but couldn't

Ideally found a venue where daytime activity was also an option. While the 2018 project will still only be available from the evenings through until the morning, we will be looking to use the premises as a community facility from April – October, when it isn't being used as a Night Shelter, providing arts and craft, support groups and education courses for people who are homeless.

Plans for the future

The City desperately needs this project and alongside the other projects, as part of our Rough Sleeping Initiative Fund, it will go a long way to reducing rough sleeping in the city.

Working with the community to provide responses in winter

Brighton & Hove (2018)

Since 2010, the number of rough sleepers in Brighton & Hove has increased year on year. At the same time there has been a rise in interest from members of the public who wish to support rough sleepers and help find solutions to rough sleeping in the city. This has generated a great deal of press interest and an increase in the number of public enquires to our team. A lot of interest has focused on the provision of SWEP and shelter for rough sleepers in the cold winter months.

SWEP

Brighton & Hove City Council has been operating a SWEP service since 2005. When it was first introduced, the service operated when the temperature was predicted to drop below zero degrees for three consecutive nights. In January 2014 the protocol was changed to include activating SWEP for amber weather warnings. Following public interest and internal discussions between us and our lead councillor the decision was made in 2017/18 to open at two consecutive nights at zero degrees, amber weather warnings and to allow a more flexible approach to opening for feels like temperature, wind chill and rain. This resulted in our service provider Brighton Housing Trust opening SWEP on 44 nights and providing 1393 bed spaces for 243 individuals over the winter period.

In 2018, mindful of the public feeling that SWEP provision was insufficient, we embarked upon a public consultation on the temperature trigger and asked for ideas on how we can better communicate to rough sleepers when the provision is open. This survey generated 345 responses with 78% being in favour of moving to a new, lower SWEP trigger.

Brighton Nightshelter

In 2017 Brighton & Hove City Council opened its first winter Nightshelter. We spent a great deal of time searching for a venue without success, however in the end we were able to offer 30 bed spaces in the Brighton Centre (a council managed concert and conference centre), moving to a local church for a week when the centre was booked. The service operated from 10th December 2017 until 11th March 2018. Run by the City Council, the service offered a space for the most vulnerable rough sleepers while longer term solutions for their rough sleeping were found. We evaluated this service in April 2018 and identified areas of success and areas for development, but the overall evaluation was positive and something we wished to recreate in 2018/19.

Community Involvement

For our team, the level of community interest in the work we do and the services we commission is new to us and we are working to develop ways of engaging with the public and utilising the skills and support of volunteers. To support this, we have commissioned a Charity Link Project through Rough Sleeper Grant Funding which supports and links with volunteers and community initiatives.

One example of community involvement is Galvanise Brighton & Hove. Galvanise is part of the European End Street Homelessness Campaign, which is a movement of cities working towards housing the most vulnerable people in our societies, coordinated and supported by World Habitat. The Galvanise Brighton and Hove campaign, led by YMCA DLG and Brighton YMCA, conducted a registration week in late 2017 which used volunteers to survey 125 rough sleepers on the streets of the city. Volunteers and organisations across the city are using the information gathered to work towards developing solutions to end rough sleeping in the city: www.galvanisebh.org/

Community Support in Winter Provision

The community supports winter provision in the city in a number of ways, these are just three examples;

- Community members have developed networks of volunteers who spread the word about the opening of SWEP across the city.
- Volunteers were invaluable in the provision of the Brighton Nightshelter they provided support, donations and were instrumental in developing a network of hotels, restaurants and suppliers who provided food donations.
- There is a Churches Nightshelter that operates within the city and accommodates 15 people per night in a network of 7 churches staffed by volunteers.

Developments for Winter 2018/19

Severe Weather Provision for Brighton & Hove is currently out to tender with the following developments for 2018/19 onwards:

- The trigger for SWEP will be one night at a predicted 'feels like' temperature of zero degrees or an Amber or Red weather warning.
- Provision for afternoon opening in Amber and Red heatwave warnings.
- Greater use of volunteers and a wider network of staff to support the delivery of the enhanced provision.
- Greater focus on assessment and ensuring SWEP users are linked in with services.

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The Brighton Nightshelter has also been out to tender for provision in 2018/19 for 30 bed spaces from the beginning of November until mid-March. The use of the volunteers was a very positive aspect of the service and we have been clear in the tender that the provider of the service must build on and enhance this aspect of the service.

Extending access to anyone in need

Liverpool City Council (2018)

Liverpool City Council has long had services in place to encourage rough sleepers into settled accommodation as well as additional emergency provision to bring rough sleepers indoors during periods of severe weather. However, we recognised that a cohort of individuals was not engaging with support, alongside some who had limited options to come indoors at all except during SWEP. There were also concerns about the increasingly poor health and wellbeing of this group, including those with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).

So, in November 2017 we opened Labre House as a 'Rough Sleeper Night Hub' – a safe, warm place for rough sleepers to access overnight. While the service's aim was to provide an emergency shelter, it was also recognised as a vital opportunity to re-engage individuals in the intensive work to bring them in doors permanently and reduce rough sleeping in the city overall.

Having this improved facility provided the whole system with an opportunity to re-think our approach to providing support to people on the streets. This prioritised the need for the most entrenched people to be able to access the centre, changed the arbitrary distinctions assigned to different groups and removed confusing messages about how and when people could access help.

We recognised too that, while needs are particularly acute during the winter, they do not automatically improve when the weather does. Therefore, Labre House remains open every night as a safe place offering people help and support and opportunities to come off the street more permanently. In addition, it provides a 'whole person' approach to meeting the individual needs of those accessing the facility. Importantly, there are no blanket 'eligibility' restrictions for access to the centre on, for example, people with NRPF, people with dogs or people with no local connection. This means that any person rough sleeping in our city can seek help under the banner 'Always Room Inside'.

The support at the centre has been delivered through an existing contract with a third sector charitable organisation, which has significant experience of working with people with histories of homelessness and rough sleeping.

We have also used this as an opportunity to further improve partnership working with the voluntary 'street teams' that have become established in Liverpool over the last few years. A number now use Labre House as a base in the evenings, they have begun to signpost people on the streets to the centre and some groups have stopped giving out food on the streets completely, or are supporting people direct in the Night Hub instead.

Opening the Centre had an immediate impact on rough sleeping, with 47% fewer individuals rough sleeping across December 2017. On average, 60 people per night are using the centre and coming directly from a rough sleeping/at risk of rough sleeping situation.

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However, this new all-year-round facility is being delivered from the current building only as a short-term arrangement because Liverpool has exciting plans to develop a holistic multi-agency (health, addictions, housing, DWP, education, training, employment etc), 'Street Lifestyle' service available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, from a brand new, purpose built facility.

Challenges

Opening the facility has not come without its challenges:

- Identifying a suitable building
The building had to be close to where people sleep rough, in order for them to be willing to access. This brought us into residential areas who were broadly supportive of the approach but concerned about the management of risks and disruption within the community, especially at night. We have held meetings with the wider community since the facility was first proposed to manage some of those issues. We would recommend that any similar facilities are adequately serviced with outside space for smoking and waiting, separate from general residential areas.
- Increased numbers attending
This has been a challenge as, inevitably, numbers have increased since opening. We have seen people attending the facility from across the wider city region and elsewhere, with local authorities contacting us to see if they can refer people into the hub. We will re-connect people who access from outside Liverpool and work with other Authorities to understand that Labre House is a solution for those rough sleeping in Liverpool.
- Managing expectations for move on
Some individuals are more challenging to find long-term solutions for e.g. those with NRPF, especially where there are complex issues around substances and individuals being further away from work without access to benefits. These remain some of our more challenging cases to move on and work is ongoing to identify solutions, including specific interventions through the MHCLG Rough Sleeping Initiative funding awarded to Liverpool for 2018/19.
- Ensuring staffing is adequate
Staffing levels have increased (from four staff each night to six) since opening and are high to ensure intensive support can be offered and to ensure the health and safety of service users, staff and the local community. We will continue to monitor this.

Summer SWEP – provision during the heatwave

Haringey Council (2018)

As this summer's heatwave got underway, Haringey council grew concerned about the welfare of people on the streets. With no day centre provision in the borough, they decided to open a space during the day where people could go for shade, water, sun-cream and support. One of Haringey's winter SWEP providers has a hut structure in their courtyard and offered to open this as daytime shelter. Council officers publicised the daytime shelter through outreach teams, homelessness providers, substance misuse services and the police.

During regular discussions between the council and outreach team, additional concerns were raised about the physical health of several people who had been in and out of hospital. There was an increasing risk that the hot weather was going to worsen their health. In response, Haringey opened three SWEP beds overnight and asked these providers to let people stay inside during the day as well. The beds were kept open even when weather cooled in order to maintain support, because these people's lives had been chaotic on the streets. By

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offering a more stable form of emergency accommodation, the outreach team was able to put move on plans in place for all three people.

Haringey's providers were very flexible about providing summer SWEP. It helped that there were only low numbers of people accessing the service, and they were able to find rooms using a combination of voids and temporary beds in spaces that are usually non-residential.

The daytime provision was open for three weeks. While there wasn't huge demand, Haringey wanted to ensure that there was an offer for anyone who needed it. There was also support and advice from outreach to people on the streets about how to keep well in hot weather.

West Berkshire Council (2018)

West Berkshire have shared this short film about opening SWEP during the 2018 summer heatwave in partnership with provider Two Saints: www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHRNwwy33eg

Flexible SWEP

Tamworth (2017)

"This year we trialled that on the first placement we would place for a minimum of 3 nights initially in a B&B, regardless of how long the severe weather was to last, with the aim of allowing the time for the officers to try and engage with the clients more effectively and ascertain more information to provide more effective assistance. This also allowed the time for other prevention work to take place i.e. referrals to supported accommodation etc. What we have previously found when only placing for 1 night the clients will often not engage or attend the office so that we can properly assess their circumstances."

Sample LA protocol – triggers

Trigger point: the SWEP Protocol will be activated during times of severe weather when the Met Office forecasts a minimum temperature of 0°C or below three nights or more. SWEP may also be activated in other periods of severe weather, as directed by Housing Needs, in consideration of factors such as severe snowfall and wind chill. When activated, the SWEP provision will be open for a minimum of three nights even if the temperatures rise before this point

Referrals

Reading (2017)

"Great partnership working and acceptance of the provision - an absolute want to help those during cold weather and prevent risk of harm on the streets. Those that attended without referral were never turned away - the safest option was considered and sit-up service with supervision was given if more appropriate. In terms of managing risk, we prefer for people to be referred into SWEP via our Housing Advice and Street Outreach Team in a planned way – this avoids other statutory agencies telling people to 'just turn up' in the later hours which can be more challenging for night staff to manage and can be disruptive to service and SWEP users. However, whenever this does occur, foyer/sit-in provision and hot drinks are offered."

Sample LA protocol – referrals

Approaches by people not on the referral list: Where an individual attempts to access an emergency space and they are not on the referral list, entry to the hostel will be at the discretion of the provider, taking into account any risks, vulnerabilities and the weather.

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If an individual is unable to access the provision due to lack of space or an unmanageable risk, the service provider should advise them of the referral process which can be undertaken the following day.

In these circumstances the hostel providing SWEP must contact the Emergency Duty Team (EDT). The out-of-hours service will provide emergency accommodation to any individuals where there is reason to believe they are homeless. The EDT will notify Housing Needs of any placements that are made, who will in turn notify the outreach team for information and engagement purposes.

In certain situations it may not be possible to provide a SWEP space in the standard provision due to risk or lack of space. Where no other suitable or viable alternative can be found a B&B placement will be considered.

Dog-friendly provision

Exeter SafeSleep – Julian House (2017)

“Local hostels have a very controlled approach to allowing clients’ dogs access to services. These controls are in place in order to reduce the risk of spread of disease between dogs and to ensure that pet owners are taking proper responsibility for their dog. Despite the good reasons for these controls being in place, they act as a barrier for some clients.

SafeSleep took a more relaxed attitude to dogs accompanying their owners and accessing their service. Our written Policy does not require prior checks on dogs, but is based around responsible ownership and active risk assessment within the building.

Due to the open nature of the hostel space, dog cages were available to be used, in order create separation and safety for dogs and other residents. Clients were able to have their dog sleep on their bed with them or next to their bed as they would do whilst living on the streets. Only one owner needed to use a cage for their dog for a few nights, in order to reassure the animal and provider with a safe space that it could retire to.

Clients with pets all demonstrated good ownership and care of their dogs and there were no issues with dogs during the operation of the service.”

Sample LA protocol – Dogs

Where a SWEP user has a dog, the referring agency will work with to identify suitable alternative arrangements for the pet during the SWEP period. In some circumstances, the provider may be able to accommodate dogs at the Hostel A where no alternative options have been identified. This provision will be at the discretion of the Hostel A’s manager. If accepted, the SWEP user and pet will be accommodated in a room separate from other SWEP users.

Additional provision for dogs may be available at Hostel B although it will not be possible for a separate room to be provided. Hostel staff will, therefore, seek the consent of other SWEP users to confirm that they are willing to share a room with a dog. A risk assessment will be undertaken by the outreach team and Hostel B about the dog’s behaviour and potential risks when determining whether a dog can be accommodated with other SWEP users.

Supporting women and couples

Exeter SafeSleep – Julian House (2017)

“SafeSleep offered equal access to men and women, with separate sleeping areas available to protect dignity and reduce risk. The women’s area was in the main room, closest to the staff station and in clear line of sight of staff on duty.

Male clients were prohibited from entering the female area and heterosexual couples were not able to share a space together. The three self-declared same sex couples were all, made aware of expectations regarding appropriate behaviour in an open dormitory [overnight]. However, their opportunity to share the same space and sleep close to each other brought about challenges from some of the heterosexual couples who wished to have the same opportunity.”

Managing alcohol use and withdrawal

Harrogate Homeless Project – managing alcohol withdrawal risks (2017)

After several years of accessing cold weather shelter a client successfully sought resettlement having previously been very resistant to engaging in any services. Initially he would not come indoors at cold weather shelter, preferring to sleep on the doorstep for several nights, but at least we were able to observe him and carried out checks every 30 minutes as he is a heavy drinker. Finally he agreed to come inside one night and slept on the floor. We were able to be flexible in response to his needs and allow him regular supervised access to his alcohol in a private area as his health would be at risk if he was abstinent overnight. As the service drew to a close, he agreed to view a bedsit and we subsequently helped him move in and paid a small deposit. He has maintained this tenancy for 2 months now, having spent 40 years on the street. He regularly travels around the county and occasionally sleeps rough out of choice but he has a secure stable base and can come and go as he chooses.

Sample LA protocol – alcohol

Alcohol is not allowed to be consumed inside the hostels providing SWEP. SWEP users who are alcohol dependent will be permitted to drink alcohol outside the premises.

Safety and risk

Sample LA protocol – risk

No person will be excluded from SWEP unless there are significant risk concerns.

Where risk from a SWEP user has been identified, they should be offered a space for one night, unless the risk that they pose to staff, residents, the building or themselves is unmanageable.

Where SWEP users exhibit unmanageable behaviour whilst using the provision, hostels will be permitted to remove them from the sleeping room. The SWEP user will be asked to sit in the foyer of the hostel until the morning. If any clients are being threatening or abusive to staff or other SWEP users the police should be called.

Any exclusion from a SWEP bed should be made with regard to the likelihood of resulting harm caused to the SWEP user should they need to sleep rough during a cold weather period and in line with standard good practice. Where exclusions are made, the Police should be informed requesting that they undertake a welfare check on the individual.

StreetLink and public awareness

Spelthorne (2017)

Housing officers attending places where advised by StreetLink there are homeless individuals, gained relationships with surrounding venues, coffee shops, hairdressers etc, leaving calling cards so if they see anyone street homeless during the cold period to call and officers attended next day

Using SWEP to inform service development

Harrogate (2017)

A new service has launched, called SAFE (Service for Adults Facing Exclusion), which aims to help those who face multiple exclusion and who have very complex needs. We started to recognise the need for this specialist service having seen the same people using cold weather shelter year on year, interspersed with failed hostel stays or being in/out of prison. The local authority agreed to fund a Project Leader for 5 years, and HHP are busy looking at other sources of funding to develop the service.

Links to accommodation

North Lincolnshire (2017)

Having the provision within a support provider setting meant that users could acquaint themselves with support services they may not have engaged with previously. On a couple of occasions SWEP users ultimately secured placements within the accommodation having had the chance to meet with staff.

Engaging people who continue to sleep rough

Exeter SafeSleep – Julian House (2017)

On some nights, clients would access the service and then chose to leave and not return that night. The individual client decision was sometimes related to confrontation or ongoing arguments between themselves and other clients, a need to access drugs or money to buy drugs, and sometimes the option of a friend's floor or sofa for the night.

At other times when clients left, the reasons were more difficult to fully understand although some people made active choices to leave the building when they were wound up or angry in order to avoid confrontation and the risk of being excluded from the service.

Due to the policy of active engagement and implementation of only short term exclusions for breaches of rules at the hostel, many clients sustained continuous multiple night stays within the service and, through doing this, increased their level of engagement and improved their options for referral into more permanent accommodation.



What we do

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

Let's end homelessness together

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