

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**15 SEPTEMBER 2020**

**OPERATION OF THE SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCY PROTOCOL (SWEP)**

**Ward: Borough wide**

1. Summary

This report sets out the Council's arrangements for homeless persons; specifically rough sleepers living on the streets, during periods of severe weather utilising the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP).

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the contents of this report be noted.

3. Background and Discussion

3.1. In July 2011, the Government implemented their plan 'Vision to End Rough Sleeping: No Second Night Out' to assist people off the streets. This was born mainly out of an increase in rough sleeping, especially in London and subsequent deaths that occurred on the streets during periods in severe cold weather. As a result of this, the Government aimed to ensure that no homeless person stayed on the streets for a 'second night'.

3.2. The Council was already committed to working with partners to assist rough sleepers off the streets but also recognises that in extreme weather rough sleepers are particularly vulnerable to harm and death. In response to this, the Council developed and implemented the current SWEP Protocol which sets out the arrangements the Council puts in place to ensure that people are not at risk of dying on the streets in Dartford during extreme cold weather.

3.3. In summary, the Protocol, which is operated by all Kent local authorities, is activated when the night time temperature is predicted to be zero degrees Celsius or below for three consecutive nights; as set out in government guidance. This is checked via the Meteorological Office and, if triggered, the Council contacts its voluntary and statutory partners to advise that the SWEP is in place and the website is immediately updated alongside the current out of hour's service.

3.4. It should be noted that rough sleepers are not required to be eligible for housing to be assisted, they must only be at risk and have nowhere to sleep indoors if the SWEP is triggered. All rough sleepers with no alternative accommodation options and deemed at risk are housed in emergency accommodation by the Council. This is provided in and out of office hours and supported by Porchlight. The cost of providing temporary emergency accommodation is met through the Council's temporary accommodation budget.

4. Statistics

4.1. Over the last three years the Council has activated the protocol 9 times and assisted 6 rough sleepers into emergency accommodation.

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- 4.2. In comparison to rough sleeper numbers in Dartford, the SWEP accommodated figures are low. Mainly due to many rough sleepers finding alternative options during the colder months.
  
5. How the scheme is working in practice
  - 5.1. Overall, the scheme has worked well since it was implemented in 2010 and there has been no reason to review the arrangements. The one issue that presents difficulties is in securing suitable accommodation quickly. However, no person has been left on the streets and to mitigate this the Council will be looking at different ways to ensure there is sufficient provision (see 6.2)
  
  - 5.2. The Housing Solutions Team work in very close partnership with the Dartford Churches Winter Shelter (DCWS) scheme who, until last winter, have also provided an accommodation and support solution for rough sleepers. This provision has also meant that when the SWEP has been activated, there has often been no rough sleepers found on the streets as they are already accommodated by the Winter Shelter.
  
  - 5.3. Although the SWEP has been working well in Dartford, the change in the situation regarding the Winter Shelter, due to the CoVid 19 pandemic, as well as the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act in 2018, means that the Council needs to review and enhance the existing SWEP provision. The Council will therefore, be looking to complete a review of the SWEP in the lead up to the winter months, in line with the arrangements set out in paragraph 6, and to reflect legislative changes that require councils to assist any homeless or potentially homeless persons regardless of priority need.
  
6. Arrangements for Winter 2020
  - 6.1. As Members are aware, Covid-19 has had an impact on services across the country and regrettably, the DCWS will not be able to provide a shared bed space provision due to the risks associated with separate households sharing facilities.
  
  - 6.2. In light of this, the Council will implement alternative measures to ensure that rough sleepers are not placed at risk and are safely housed in temporary accommodation. To achieve this, the Housing Solutions Team will be block booking temporary accommodation, similar to the model that was used during lockdown (further details of the measures used during lockdown can be found in the report Update on Homelessness, presented to the Scrutiny Committee on 14 July 2020, Minute No. 31 refers).
  
  - 6.3. The Housing Solutions and Private Sector Manager has already contacted the DCWS team and Porchlight colleagues to find out what their plans are for supporting the rough sleeper cohort this winter. As the DCWS are not able to provide accommodation, the housing team are planning to work jointly on a project whereby the Council provides the accommodation, Porchlight will use their expertise in supporting the cohort and the DCWS will have an 'eyes on the ground' approach to finding any additional rough sleepers that come onto the street.

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- 6.4. In June 2020 £105m worth of government funding was announced nationally to support the 'Next Steps Accommodation Plans' for rough sleepers housed in temporary accommodation due to the pandemic and includes opportunities for funding arrangements for the winter. On that basis a funding bid has been made to government and the results of this are awaited. The bid includes assistance with costs for temporary accommodation, funding for Porchlight to support rough sleepers in their accommodation and to help the DCWS fund a support worker from November 2020 to March 2021. If funding is not made available, costs will need to be met from the temporary accommodation budget with limited support provided by Porchlight, however, it is expected that funding will be made available to Dartford based on the fact that past bids have been successful.
- 6.5. In conclusion, the Council has plans in place to ensure that rough sleepers in Dartford are not at risk of dying on the streets during severe cold weather and will continue to assist all rough sleepers who require advice or accommodation, where appropriate.

7. Relationship to the Corporate Plan

This report relates to the Corporate Plan strategic aim 'to facilitate quality, choice and diversity in the housing market, to create strong and self-reliant communities and deliver high quality services to service users'.

8. Financial, legal, staffing and other administrative implications and risk assessments

Financial Implications	As set out in this report
Legal Implications	None specifically from this report
Staffing Implications	None
Admin Implications	None
Risk Assessment	The Council has plans to mitigate the risk to rough sleepers following the closure of the Winter Shelter in Dartford, as set out in this report

9. Details of Exempt Information Category

Not applicable

10. Appendices

None

<u>Documents consulted</u>	<u>Date / File Ref</u>	<u>Report Author</u>	<u>Section and Directorate</u>	<u>Exempt Information Category</u>
SWEP Protocol	Sept. 2020	Peter Dosad	Housing SD (ES)	N/A