

 <b>Executive – 1st November 2017</b>		<b>Agenda Item No.</b>  <b>4</b>
<b>Title</b>	Severe Weather Emergency Protocol	
<b>For further information about this report please contact</b>	Ken Bruno Extension 6044	
<b>Wards of the District directly affected</b>	All	
<b>Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?</b>	No	
<b>Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number</b>	Council – 20 <sup>th</sup> September 2017 Minute number TBC	
<b>Background Papers</b>	None.	

<b>Contrary to the policy framework:</b>	No
<b>Contrary to the budgetary framework:</b>	No
<b>Key Decision?</b>	No
<b>Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)</b>	Yes Ref 902
<b>Equality Impact Assessment Undertaken</b>	No

<b>Officer/Councillor Approval</b>		
<b>Officer Approval</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	06/10/2017	Bill Hunt
Head of Service	09/10/2017	Lisa Barker
CMT	05/10/2017	Chris Elliott
Section 151 Officer	10/10/2017	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer	05/10/2017	Andrew Jones
Finance	10/10/2017	Andrew Rollins
Portfolio Holder(s)	12/10/2017	Councillor Peter Phillips
<b>Consultation &amp; Community Engagement</b>		
None.		
<b>Final Decision?</b>	Yes	
<b>Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)</b>		

## 1. Summary

- 1.1 The Council currently operates a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) providing overnight accommodation for those sleeping rough (on evenings when the local night shelters are closed) when the temperature is predicted to fall to zero or below for three successive nights.
- 1.2 At its meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2017 Council approved a motion that Executive should consider changing this so that accommodation would be offered for every night when the local night shelters are closed once the temperature is predicted to drop to zero or below.
- 1.3 This report provides background information to enable Executive to come to a decision on this matter.

## 2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Council should offer overnight accommodation to rough sleepers for every night that the temperature is predicted to drop to zero or below for the winter of 2017/18.
- 2.2 That a further report be brought to Executive setting out the range of current initiatives for homelessness prevention and relief, and setting out proposals for developing this work further in the context of implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018.

## 3. Reasons for the Recommendations

- 3.1 To provide emergency support for rough sleepers in freezing conditions during the coming winter while the Executive considers further measures for tackling all homelessness issues within the district.

## 4. Policy Framework

### 4.1 Fit for the Future (FFF)

The Council's FFF Strategy is designed to deliver the Vision for the District of making it a Great Place to Live, Work and Visit. To that end amongst other things the FFF Strategy contains several Key projects.

The FFF Strategy has 3 strands – People, Services and Money and each has an external and internal element to it. The table below illustrates the impact of this proposal in relation to the Council's FFF Strategy.

FFF Strands		
People	Services	Money
<b>External</b>		
<b>Health, Homes, Communities</b>	<b>Green, Clean, Safe</b>	<b>Infrastructure, Enterprise, Employment</b>
<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Improved health for all. Housing needs for all met.	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Area has well looked after public spaces. All communities have	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Dynamic and diverse local economy. Vibrant town centres.

Impressive cultural and sports activities. Cohesive and active communities.	access to decent open space. Improved air quality. Low levels of crime and ASB.	Improved performance/productivity of local economy. Increased employment and income levels.
<b>Impacts of Proposal</b>		
The proposal will very temporarily address the housing needs of rough sleepers. It will briefly have a positive impact upon their health, or at least avoid the negative impact of sleeping outdoors in freezing conditions.	The proposal will contribute towards the safety of a small but vulnerable section of the community during severe weather.	None.
<b>Internal</b>		
<b>Effective Staff</b>	<b>Maintain or Improve Services</b>	<b>Firm Financial Footing over the Longer Term</b>
<u>Intended outcomes:</u> All staff are properly trained. All staff have the appropriate tools. All staff are engaged, empowered and supported. The right people are in the right job with the right skills and right behaviours.	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Focusing on our customers' needs. Continuously improve our processes. Increase the digital provision of services.	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Better return/use of our assets. Full Cost accounting. Continued cost management. Maximise income earning opportunities. Seek best value for money.
<b>Impacts of Proposal</b>		
None.	The proposal will result in an expanded service for rough sleepers during cold weather.	The proposal will be funded from existing resources.

## 4.2 Supporting Strategies

The SWEP is a short-term emergency measure rather than a strategic one and does not therefore help to support or deliver other strategies.

## 4.3 Changes to Existing Policies

SWEP is an operational procedure. Changes to it do not therefore impact upon the Council's strategic policies.

## 4.3 Impact Assessments

The suggested change to the SWEP trigger could have a positive impact upon a very small section of the community. (The rough sleepers count for 2016 recorded 18 people in the district.) In view of the numbers involved, and as the impact would be positive and short-term, there are not thought to be any equalities impacts from the proposal.

## 5. **Budgetary Framework**

- 5.1 No specific budget is set for SWEP costs: they are generally met from the temporary accommodation budget for homelessness.
- 5.2 The analysis of financial risks in section six below sets out the range of unknown factors and the difficulties that these cause in predicting financial impacts. However given the potential mitigating factors that are also set out the net additional costs are likely to be low. This will be monitored during the 2017/18 extension of the SWEP scheme.

## 6. **Risks**

### **Financial**

- 6.1 Reducing the SWEP trigger from three nights to one is very likely to cost additional money. Exceptions to this would be:
- an extremely mild winter (no nights of freezing weather);
  - an extremely harsh winter (all spells of freezing weather are for three or more nights so SWEP would be triggered anyway); or
  - where by chance all freezing nights happen to fall on days when a night shelter is open.
- 6.2 The additional cost will be dependent upon the following factors:
- How many rough sleepers take up the offer of overnight accommodation;
  - How many short spells of freezing weather (i.e. of one or two nights) there are over the course of the winter;
  - Whether these spells fall on evenings when night shelter provision is not available;
  - The availability and cost of temporary accommodation on those nights when SWEP is triggered.
- 6.3 All of the above factors are difficult if not impossible to predict. However significant additional cost would only be involved if there were several very short cold spells of one or two days duration, falling outside of night shelter provision, with slightly warmer days in between. A worst-case scenario cost of doing this would be in the region of £13,500. The reality would be likely to be less than this.
- 6.4 Furthermore when placed in accommodation the individual is able to claim Housing Benefit (HB) in the usual way and subject to the normal rules. The staff in the Housing Advice Team will complete a HB claim form with the individual at the time of their approach for assistance. The HB costs can be recovered by the Council from central government up to a maximum of £117.69 per week per claim. Any cost above that would be a direct cost to the General Fund. There may also be a contribution due from the individual if the costs are not entirely HB-eligible and these can be difficult to recover because the Council has to make the entire initial payment to the accommodation provider upfront. These are also therefore likely to be direct costs to the Council.

### **Service impact**

- 6.5 SWEP is an administratively cumbersome operational process. When it is triggered and street homeless people come to us to access the provision we do take the opportunity to discuss their situation with them and to provide advice and assistance with housing issues. This is in addition to the work involved in

trying to find appropriate accommodation, completing Housing Benefit forms where possible and processing payments to the guest houses/hotels. Consequently it can tie up a number of staff in the Housing Advice Team for considerable periods of time.

- 6.6 Introducing a one-night trigger would inevitably increase this workload and have a knock-on impact upon the day-to-day work of the team – processing housing applications and responding to enquiries from applicants and their advocates.
- 6.7 It has always been difficult to recruit and retain staff in the Housing Advice & Allocations Team. Since the new staffing structure was introduced in 2014 there has only been one period, of approximately one month, when the team was fully staffed. Additional work therefore inevitably results in backlogs that may be difficult to clear quickly.
- 6.8 Nevertheless, introducing a one-night trigger would increase the number of contacts with rough sleepers and would therefore provide an additional opportunity for Council officers to engage and encourage people to accept support for their health, substance misuse and housing in order to come off the streets.

### **Community impact**

- 6.9 Of the authorities that share a border with Warwick district, both Stratford and Rugby trigger SWEP after three nights.
- 6.10 Coventry has seven nights per week night shelter provision throughout the winter regardless of temperature.
- 6.11 Solihull uses a broader trigger definition of “any period of cold or severe weather from the beginning of October through to the end of March every year”. Periods of cold or severe weather are defined as any time during which the night time temperature is predicted to reach zero degrees Celsius or below for one night or when there are sustained periods of snow, ice and any other inclement weather conditions which are likely to put the lives of people sleeping rough on the streets at risk.
- 6.12 There is a possibility that triggering SWEP more frequently than neighbouring authorities could draw rough sleepers in from those areas with a knock-on impact upon the town centres and local communities. It is however most likely for rough sleepers to go to Coventry or Solihull. The potential for this impact is therefore limited to Rugby and Stratford.
- 6.13 Anecdotal evidence from voluntary sector organisations is that the reason that some rough sleepers have come to Leamington from elsewhere is the generosity of local people rather than statutory or voluntary sector services for rough sleepers. The more likely possibility is therefore that wider SWEP provision could, at the margins, be an extra incentive to stay in the district rather than an incentive to come here in the first place.
- 6.14 Whatever the frequency that the SWEP is triggered for, the provision of emergency accommodation helps to protect people who sleep rough in the district and helps to get them the support they need.

## **7. Alternative Option(s) considered**

7.1 Whilst the purpose of this report is to allow Executive to consider reducing the trigger point from three consecutive nights of temperatures at or below freezing down to one night as per the motion approved by Council, alternative options are also available for consideration:

- Introduce a trigger based on a different temperature. For example Liverpool's protocol triggers on any given night when the temperature is forecast to drop below 2 degrees. This is a clear trigger which takes into account the lack of accommodation in Liverpool for rough sleepers and recent deaths of rough sleepers on the streets due to cold.
- Use other factors to determine the trigger point. For example a definition could be used that takes into account matters like windchill (or 'feels like' forecasts), rain or snow and flooding similar to Solihull's (as set out in 6.11 above). This does though introduce a degree of subjectivity into the decision to initiate the protocol.
- Adopt a combination of the above. For example retaining the period of 3 consecutive nights but having a broader definition of "severe weather", such as a temperature level slightly above freezing, 2 degrees for example.

## 8. **Background**

8.1 The council has the SWEP protocol in place which provides emergency accommodation for street homeless people in severe weather conditions. This is triggered when the temperature is forecast to be below 0C for three successive nights. The accommodation provided is in local bed & breakfast establishments and hotels or by the night shelters on evenings when they are open.

8.2 Councils are encouraged by central government to have a SWEP in place and the trigger point of three consecutive nights with temperatures at zero or below is set out in national guidelines as being a minimum requirement. Any council has the discretion to set a more generous threshold if it so chooses.

8.3 Night shelter provision is currently provided by two separate voluntary organisations on different nights, giving coverage on four nights per week: Wednesday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

8.4 Under the current three-night trigger arrangements SWEP was initiated on three occasions in 2016/17, on two occasions in 2015/16 and on six occasions in 2014/15. The number of people presenting has ranged from three to 13 with the average being six or seven people.

8.5 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was enacted earlier this year and places significant new duties on councils for preventing and dealing with homelessness from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2018. Officers are considering the implications of this and will be bringing a further report to Executive with proposals for a comprehensive set of measures for tackling all forms of homelessness in the district in the future, within the context of the new duties.