

 Executive – 3 April 2019		Agenda Item No. 7
Title	Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)	
For further information about this report please contact	Simon Brooke - Housing Advice & Allocations Manager Extension 6427	
Wards of the District directly affected	All	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006?	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	Executive 1 November 2017 Council – 20 September 2017	
Background Papers	None.	

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

Officer/Councillor Approval		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Chief Executive/Deputy Chief Executive	2/3/2019	Bill Hunt
Head of Service	28/2/2019	Lisa Barker
CMT	2/3/2019	Chris Elliott
Section 151 Officer	2/3/2019	Mike Snow
Monitoring Officer	2/3/2019	Andrew Jones
Finance	2/3/2019	Andrew Rollins
Portfolio Holder(s)	4/3/2019	Councillor Peter Phillips
Consultation & Community Engagement		
None.		
Final Decision?	Yes	
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		

1. **Summary**

- 1.1 This report sets out the Council's policy in operating a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) making recommendations for the future of the policy following a change last year to extend the provision from when the temperature is predicted to fall to zero or below for three successive nights to a policy to provide emergency accommodation when the temperature falls to zero or below for one night.
- 1.2 The change approved by Executive in November 2017 was agreed for one year with an agreement to return to Executive to update about other initiatives around homelessness and to approve a SWEP policy for subsequent years. Other reports to Executive have addressed the other homeless activities but we have not approved a SWEP policy going forward.

2. **Recommendation**

- 2.1 That Executive agree that the Council should continue to ensure overnight accommodation is available to rough sleepers for every night that the temperature is predicted to drop to zero or below.
- 2.2 That Executive agree that we operate a more flexible policy when there is heavy rain, snow, high winds or similar extenuating factors. So the temperature maybe above zero, at between 1 and 3 degrees centigrade but conditions are such that the Housing Services team consider conditions on the street to be severe. This flexibility allows our staff the ability to react to conditions on the ground.

3. **Reasons for the Recommendations**

- 3.1 Last year the Council decided to extend the provision under the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) from when the temperature falls to zero or below from three consecutive nights to one night. Although this change led to an increase in costs and time resources for staff, these were reasonable and achievable within existing budgets and staff resources and therefore can be extended going forward.
- 3.2 The increased provision ensured that rough sleepers were offered accommodation on more occasions in severe weather, and this was considered a positive change. During the winter 17/18, SWEP was activated on 31 occasions of which 16 occasions the primary provision was at night shelters. This was a significant increase in activity. The Council provided temporary accommodation to rough sleepers that amounted to 101 nights of accommodation. The cost of this was £5,600. Some of these costs would be recovered from Housing Benefit claims. SWEP has been activated on 11 occasions to date during this winter.
- 3.3 The number of rough sleepers that WDC have accommodated is mitigated by the availability of night shelter accommodation. Last year shelters were not available every night and in these circumstances the only other avenue was to provide guest house accommodation. This year we have opened a direct access hostel at William Wallsgrove House. This facility is available every night to provide accommodation for rough sleepers in addition to the night shelters. The provision at William Wallsgrove House has transformed the provision for rough

sleepers and will mean that there are less people sleeping rough in general and provides additional capacity to minimise the need for guest house accommodation, reducing additional costs and work for the Allocations & Advice team.

- 3.4 The new SWEP provision therefore can be sustained and will provide a safety net to the provision of emergency accommodation at the hostel and night shelters. We have also reflected on the conditions that are caused by wind, snow and rain and are recommending that the policy is applied flexibly in these circumstances.
- 3.5 Staff working in our Housing Advice & Allocations team check the weather each day and when the conditions are met we will activate SWEP. This involves notifying all key agencies working with rough sleepers that SWEP is activated and that there is no need for anyone to be sleeping rough. The agencies will then refer rough sleepers to the provision available or if the accommodation is not suitable to the Housing Advice & Allocations team.

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
External		
Health, Homes, Communities	Green, Clean, Safe	Infrastructure, Enterprise, Employment
<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Improved health for all. Housing needs for all met. Impressive cultural and sports activities. Cohesive and active communities.	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Area has well looked after public spaces. All communities have access to decent open space. Improved air quality. Low levels of crime and ASB.	<u>Intended outcomes:</u> Dynamic and diverse local economy. Vibrant town centres. Improved performance/ productivity of local economy. Increased employment and income levels.
Impacts of Proposal		
The proposal will confirm the improved provision to address the housing needs of rough sleepers. It will have a positive impact upon their health,	The proposal will contribute towards the safety of a small but vulnerable section of the community during severe weather.	None.

avoiding the negative impact of sleeping outdoors in freezing conditions.		
Internal		
Effective Staff	Maintain or Improve Services	Firm Financial Footing over the Longer Term
<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.
Impacts of Proposal		
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. However, SWEP and extending its operation is a valuable part of our approach to rough sleeping and improving our systems for tackling rough sleeping are a part of our Housing and Homelessness Strategy.

4.3 **Changes to Existing Policies**

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

4.4 **Impact Assessments**

Continuing with the change to the SWEP trigger has a potentially positive impact upon rough sleepers. In view of the small numbers involved, and as the impact would be positive and short-term, there are no adverse equality 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 and can be met within existing budgets.

6. Risks

Financial

- 6.1 Reducing the SWEP trigger from three nights to one was thought to be likely to cost additional money. This risk has now been mitigated by the further work on rough sleeping in the district and in particular the opening in September 2018 of a direct access hostel at William Wallsgrove House.
- 6.2 Although last year the number of people accommodated through SWEP increased, with the improved provision of accommodation this year the costs of SWEP provision through guest houses has returned to lower levels and can be funded within existing budgets.
- 6.3 Any costs associated with SWEP are funded from our bed and breakfast budget, and paid from the General Fund. Costs are minimised via individual claims for Housing Benefit, when placed in accommodation the individual is able to claim Housing Benefit (HB) in the usual way and subject to the normal rules.
- 6.4 Currently the bed and breakfast expenditure is currently within budget. The proposals are not expected to increase expenditure significantly and can be managed within existing resources.

Service impact

- 6.5 SWEP impacts upon the work of the Housing Advice & Allocations team. This has involved meeting the rough sleeper 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.
- 6.6 Although introducing a one-night trigger has increased this workload, the work we are undertaking with rough sleepers and the provision of a direct access hostel provides a counter balance ensuring that the section can continue to provide a full range of duties and operate SWEP.
- 6.7 Overall it is recognised that increasing the number of contacts with rough sleepers provides 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

- 6.8 Additional SWEP provision as part of a suite of actions to address problems of rough sleeping will have a positive impact on the community; the general public are concerned with people sleeping on the streets and there are also public safety concerns.
- 6.9 Concerns have been expressed that additional provision for SWEP will attract people from other parts of the country or adjoining boroughs. However 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.

7. Alternative Option(s) considered

7.1 Last year as part of the original decision to extend the SWEP provision Executive considered alternative options including:

- Introduce a trigger based on a different temperature.
- Use other factors to determine the trigger point.
- Adopt a combination of the above.

The proposal to extend from 3 nights to 1 night with temperatures predicted to be zero degrees or below was considered a clear and considered position.

7.2 The proposal to add a flexible approach to account for other factors affecting the severe conditions could be rejected if this was considered too vague or more generous than wanted.

8. Background

8.1 The Council are taking a number of actions on preventing homelessness and in particular tackle rough sleeping in the district. The SWEP provision is another tool recognising the difficulties rough sleepers face and how difficult it can be when the weather is particularly cold.

8.2 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.

8.3 Councils are directed 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.

8.4 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.

8.5 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.

8.6 The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 was enacted earlier this year and places significant new duties on councils for preventing and dealing with homelessness from 1st April 2018.

8.7 This measure to extend SWEP is one part of our work to prevent rough sleeping. Other measures taken include, the opening of William Wallsgrove House, the appointment of a rough sleeper coordinator, additional funding for a support worker for rough sleepers from Warwickshire County Council awarded to P3, additional move on accommodation through Cyrenians.