
To: Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4)

Date: 2nd July 20206

Subject: Severe Weather Emergency Protocol Update

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 The Housing and Homelessness Service attended the Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (SB4) on the 23 October 2025 to set out the changes to the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol in Coventry and the rationale for these changes. Members of the committee requested a follow up report to be added to the programme updating the Board on the annual statistics of SWEP, to ensure there had been no negative impact on vulnerable people from the changes to the policy.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Communities and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Board (4) are recommended to:
- 1) Consider the content of the briefing note
 - 2) Provide any comments or feedback on the SWEP process and the amendments
 - 3) Identify any further recommendations to the Cabinet Member

3 Coventry SWEP 2025-2026

- 3.1 Coventry reviews its Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) each spring, using the previous year's information to inform planning for the following year. This is done in collaboration with partner agencies via face to face and online meetings. We collaborated with The Salvation Army, Coventry Refugee and Migrant Centre, Kairos Women Working Together, Langar Aid and Probation Services.
- 3.2 Following feedback from MHCLG and through discussion across the West Midland Combined Authority's (WMCA) Rough Sleeping Task Group it was apparent that Coventry's SWEP numbers were significantly higher than comparable areas. The data clearly showed that although SWEP is intended to accommodate people rough sleeping a large number of people who utilised it in Coventry were never found rough sleeping rough either in previous years or after their SWEP placement had ended. We therefore reviewed approaches used elsewhere and engaged partners

in discussions on implementing a new model. During the 2025-2026 SWEP period, 62 of the 96 people who used SWEP were found rough sleeping on at least one occasion.

- 3.3 As a result, Coventry adopted a two-tier SWEP model, based on advice from MHCLG who were confident that the Coventry team proactively support rough sleepers and knew that the increased numbers of people who present when SWEP is activated created significant operational pressures, reducing the team's capacity to focus on people sleeping rough. The criteria that SWEP is enacted when the Met Office state that the temperature in the city will 'Feel like Naught degrees centigrade' remained the same.
- 3.4 Tier 1 prioritises known rough sleepers already identified by the Rough Sleeping Outreach Team, triggered by 'feels like' 0 on the first night. When SWEP is activated for more than three consecutive nights, Tier 2 is implemented, extending access to individuals believed to be rough sleeping by partner agencies but not previously known to services.
- 3.5 The aim was to ensure the delivery of SWEP in 2025–2026 was more efficient and targeted at people sleeping rough, with improved engagement and operational performance.

4 Delivery - What We Did

- 4.1 The delivery of the SWEP during winter 2025–2026 reflects a clear shift in both scale and approach compared to previous years. Overall, the service supported significantly fewer individuals, operating across fewer nights. A total of 96 people were accommodated across 40 nights, compared to 342 people across 60 nights in 2024–2025. This represents a 72% reduction in people supported and a 33% reduction in provision, a lot of which is a result of the number of nights that SWEP was activated.
- 4.2 Despite this reduction in scale, SWEP delivery was notably more efficient. The number of individuals who did not attend after being offered a space (DNAs) fell sharply from 101 in the previous year to just 14. This suggests that referral processes were more targeted and that placements were better aligned with need. The number of DNAs in 2024/25 resulted in significant work being undertaken for these individuals who never accessed SWEP even though they had been referred in for the service. Feedback from operational partners supports this, highlighting clearer processes, more consistent decision-making, and a smoother overall delivery model.
- 4.3 Demand patterns, during the Winter period, continue to follow a seasonal trend, with January remaining the peak period for need. However, unlike previous years where demand remained consistently high through to March, usage in 2025–2026 declined more rapidly after the January peak due to less incidents of cold weather.

5 Who was Supported

- 5.1 The profile of individuals accessing SWEP has also shifted. Notably, 47% of those supported were new to rough sleeping services, suggesting that SWEP is increasingly acting as a first point of contact for people experiencing homelessness. This presents a clear opportunity for earlier intervention and prevention. At the

same time, a smaller but significant group—approximately 13.5% of users—had restricted eligibility for housing support, meaning they have very limited or no options for move-on accommodation due to their current immigration status. This group continues to present repeatedly across SWEP periods, highlighting an ongoing systemic challenge. All this group are continuously encouraged to engage with specialist advice to secure a remedy to their immigration status which could include returning to their country of origin, access the asylum system (if possible) or resolve their immigration status so they can remain in the country and access public services.

- 5.2 Partners reported challenges around managing late presentations where people approach late in the day or after services are closed and noted that some services were unclear on when SWEP was activated. This approach was intentional, reflecting previous experience where open access led to high volumes of referrals without sustained engagement or positive outcomes. In previous years people either did not attend or did stay overnight but didn't engage with support to end their homelessness during office hours.

6 Outcomes

- 96 individuals were accommodated whilst SWEP was active
- 40 people moved into accommodation
- 18 people are still sleeping rough
- 13 people's whereabouts are unknown
- 10 people went to prison
- 7 people already had accommodation available to them and returned to it
- 2 people had mental health sections/placements
- 2 people are sofa surfing
- 1 person went into hospital
- 1 person moved out of area for reconnection
- 1 person moved back to hometown
- 1 person has since deceased

7 In Summary

- 7.1 SWEP in 2025–2026 has transitioned from a high-volume emergency response to a more targeted and controlled service aimed specifically at people sleeping rough. This has resulted in better use of resources, improved engagement, and a more consistent delivery model. However, it also highlights emerging challenges around access, communication, and the need to respond more effectively to both new rough sleepers and individuals with no recourse to public funds. SWEP is there as a response to support people who are rough sleeping and we can see that previously it is used by many others. It can provide opportunities to engage people earlier, but when the Rough Sleeping Team do this, it takes attention away from those people sleeping out at night now and reduces the input for the people the service is targeted at.

7.2 This year numbers of people approaching out of hours was manageable and allowed us to be more flexible than we could when these numbers of referrals and approaches were much higher.

8 Looking Ahead to 2026-2027

8.1 Looking ahead, the focus for 2026–2027 will be on supporting people to access SWEP during the day strengthening access routes, clearer communication with partners, and developing targeted responses for key groups, including new rough sleepers and those with restricted eligibility. Ensuring the right balance between efficiency and accessibility will be critical to maintaining both value for money and effective support for those most in need.

8.2 Meetings will take place with partners during the Summer of 2026 to ascertain their thoughts about the changes and what learning we should take into planning for SWEP next winter.

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