



SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCY PROTOCOL (SWEP)

**FOLKESTONE & HYTHE DISTRICT COUNCIL
HELPING ROUGH SLEEPERS
IN FOLKESTONE & HYTHE DISTRICT**

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1. Introduction

The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) ensures that appropriate responses are made for people sleeping rough during periods of severe weather, who under normal circumstances would not be owed a statutory duty under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, or who would not normally engage with services.

It is good practice for local authorities to have SWEP arrangements in place, and although there is no statutory duty on local authorities to provide shelter during severe weather, Folkestone & Hythe District (FHDC) understands the humanitarian obligation it has to individuals sleeping rough.

The protocol aims to minimise risks to these individuals during periods of severe weather and provides an opportunity to engage with hard-to-reach groups and signpost them to appropriate support services.

The Council encourages anyone who has concerns regarding someone who may be sleeping rough in Folkestone & Hythe District Council to report their concerns.

2. Eligibility Criteria

SWEP operates outside the eligibility criteria for housing assistance set out by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and Part VII of the Housing Act 1996. A person sleeping rough is not required to evidence that they are eligible for assistance and are not required to have recourse to public funds to access accommodation provided through the protocol.

The individual sleeping rough must:

- Be at risk if they continue to sleep rough during the course of the severe weather.
- Have nowhere available to them to sleep indoors during the course of the severe weather (indoors does not include cars, sheds or garages).
- Agree to assistance.
- Have been sleeping rough in the Folkestone & Hythe District and identified as doing so by the Council's Outreach Worker, employed by Porchlight, in partnership with the Rainbow Centre.

There are other exceptions, if an individual is considered too high risk to accommodate on the advice of police, probation or mental health services for example, or an individual is aggressive, violent or threatening violence, then in these circumstances, the Council's Housing Options Team may take the decision not to provide temporary accommodation.

Some individuals decide to refuse interventions from housing options and support services and choose to continue sleeping rough.

3. Risk Management

Should any incidents of anti-social behaviour or unacceptable behaviour occur during the time that emergency temporary accommodation is being provided the Police will be contacted (if appropriate) along with any other agencies that are either providing support to the rough sleeper or who could carry out relevant assessments and provide further support.

The Council will review the assistance being provided to see if there are any alternative ways to prevent rough sleeping during the severe weather whilst at the same time managing the risks.

4. Refusals of accommodation

The extreme cold weather increases the risk of death or serious illness to people who sleep rough. If an individual decides to refuse to accept an offer of temporary accommodation during this time the Housing Options Team or partner agencies will:

- Provide clear information about the risks of cold weather on their health,
- Consider if there is cause to believe that the person was not capable of making an informed judgement and if it is appropriate to make a referral to adult social care or the community mental health team.
- Inform Outreach Services within the District

5. When will SWEP be activated

SWEP will be triggered when the night time temperature is predicted to be zero degrees Celsius or below or there are extenuating circumstances accompanying the predicted zero degrees Celsius temperature. The extenuating circumstances will be determined by the Council's Housing Options Team.

Previously, SWEP has been triggered when the temperature is predicted to be zero degrees Celsius or below for three consecutive nights.

This revised protocol, supports that SWEP will be triggered when the temperature is predicted to be zero degrees Celsius or below on a single night, or there are extenuating circumstances, as determined by the Council's Housing Options Team.

Extenuating circumstances may be defined as being when there is a severe wind-chill factor, snow, heavy prolonged rain, etc.

In the event there are no extenuating circumstances SWEP will be triggered where the weather is predicted to be zero degrees Celsius or below throughout the full length of a single night.

During periods of cold or severe weather Folkestone & Hythe District Council's Housing Options Team will check the weather forecast every day on the Meteorological Office website at www.metoffice.gov.uk

6. SWEP Accommodation Type

Individuals who are sleeping rough will be placed into emergency temporary accommodation for the period of the severe weather when SWEP is activated.

7. SWEP Procedure

Once the decision has been taken to activate the protocol the Council's Housing Options Team will notify the following internal and external agencies/organisations by 12 noon (midday) on any day that severe weather conditions apply:

1. The Folkestone & Hythe District Council Lifeline Service (Emergency Out-of-Hours Service lifeline.proactive@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk)
2. Folkestone Churches Winter Shelter (During December to February)
3. Rainbow Centre (Contact No. 01303 850733 info@rainbow-centre.org)
4. Porchlight - Rough Sleeper Service (Contact No. 0800 567 7699)
5. Salvation Army (01303 251379 folkestone@salvationarmy.org.uk)
6. Kent Police (Folkestone Police Station)
7. The Folkestone & Hythe District Council Communications Team communications@folkestone-hythe.gov.uk
8. Any other appropriate agencies

The information on the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol page of Folkestone & Hythe District Council's website will also be updated.

The Folkestone Churches Winter Shelter provides accommodation for vulnerable people during the coldest months of the year from December through to February. Key to the project is the numerous volunteers who give up their time to support the shelter. It should be noted that many individuals sleeping rough choose not to access the Winter Shelter or have been excluded due to their behaviour towards the volunteers or other individuals accessing the shelter.

The Folkestone & Hythe District Council Homelessness Forum meets on a quarterly basis to discuss the homelessness issues facing the district and to develop local solutions where possible. The forum is led by the council in partnership with a range of other statutory and voluntary sector partners. The Forum will play a key role in monitoring progress toward the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan for Folkestone & Hythe District Council.

What the Council's Out-of-Hours Service do:

- Any individual sleeping rough who wishes to be provided with shelter under SWEP needs to attend the Civic Centre before 5pm where possible. If they are unable to get to the Council Offices before 5pm they must call the Council's Out-of-Hours Team on 01303 221888 by 10pm in order to be placed in shelter that same night. If they approach the Council after 10pm they will need to wait until the following day and attend the Civic Centre to be assessed and sheltered that night if SWEP has been continued.
- Any individual placed by the SWEP Out-of-Hours service will be advised to present at Folkestone & Hythe District Council's Civic Centre the following day by 10am so that arrangements to extend their accommodation for the duration of SWEP can be arranged. If the individual does not attend the Civic Centre by 10am the accommodation may be ended.
- The SWEP Out-of-Hours service will advise the individual that they must contact the Council's Housing Options Team to find out if they need to complete a Housing Benefit or Discretionary Housing Payment claim when the offices next open (i.e. the following day, or following Monday if over a weekend).
- The SWEP Out-of-Hours service will complete a placement form and e-mail the Housing Options team on making any placement under the SWEP.

What the Housing Options Team do:

- Individuals sleeping rough can be referred to the Folkestone Churches Winter Shelter either by the Council's Housing Options Team or any partner agency and they have to undertake the registration process which includes a risk assessment conducted by a Winter Shelter Project Worker, this can be achieved by visiting them at the Folkestone Rainbow Centre between 10.00 am and 1.00pm Monday to Friday.
- The Council's Housing Options Team will arrange for the placement of individuals sleeping rough into emergency temporary accommodation or similar during severe weather if the Folkestone Churches Winter Shelter is unable to accommodate and there are no risks of harm to others from the individual.
- Transport will be provided for the individual if they are unable to walk to the accommodation secured for them if it is not within a reasonable distance or they do not have the funds to pay for transport. The Council will arrange and pay for this travel (if the placement is arranged through the SWEP out-of-hours emergency service they will also arrange this provision).
- The Council will help the person complete a Housing Benefit claim where necessary.

The Council's Housing Options Team will ensure that every effort is made to engage with individuals accommodated during the extreme cold weather period so they do not return to the streets this will include working with our partner agencies and voluntary organisations.

The Council is able to offer temporary kennel provision for individuals with dogs to enable them to take up this accommodation.

8. When is SWEP deactivated?

The continuation of SWEP arrangements will be reviewed on a daily basis with a decision being made every morning (as per section 4) as to whether arrangements will be in place for a further night. SWEP arrangements will normally be deactivated when severely inclement weather conditions have ceased. When the decision has been taken to deactivate SWEP all partner organisations will be informed by e-mail and all forms of communication will be updated accordingly.

Once SWEP arrangements have been deactivated emergency temporary accommodation and kennelling for dogs will no longer be provided.

9. Financial Provision

The cost of providing emergency temporary accommodation during SWEP will be covered from existing Council resources. However such costs may in some instances be recovered through the submission of Housing Benefit or Discretionary Housing Payments claims for the emergency temporary accommodation provided by the Council (other than the Folkestone Winter Shelter accommodation) if the individual has recourse to public funding.

The cost of kennelling dogs will not be sought.

10. Monitoring

The following information will be recorded and used to monitor the extent of rough sleeping in the District:

- Number, age, gender and nationality of rough sleeper
- Number of nights accommodated for each rough sleeper
- The cost of emergency temporary accommodation per night for each rough sleeper

11. Review

This Protocol will be reviewed on an annual basis.

November 2020