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| To: | Housing Panel |
| Date: | 12th November 2018 |
| Report of: | **Rough Sleeping & Single Homelessness Manager** |
| Title of Report:  | **Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)**  |

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| Summary and recommendations |
| Purpose of report: | To inform the panel of SWEP preparations |
| Key decision: | No |
| Executive Board Member: | Councillor Linda Smith, Leisure and Housing |
| Corporate Priority: | Meeting housing need |
| Policy Framework: | Housing & Homelessness Strategy |
| Recommendation: That Housing Panel resolves to note the preparations for the 2018/19 winter.  |

# Summary

* Oxford City Council and local homelessness organisations have agreed a protocol for SWEP winter 2018/19 to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to meet needs this winter
* Capacity – across core SWEP venues, winter shelters and the recently expanded SitUp service – will be significantly greater than in winter 2017/18.
* During the winter the new, Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) funded winter shelters and the expanded Oxford Winter Night Shelter (OWNS) will provide refuge for people – including those with no local connection to Oxford or recourse to public funds - on a nightly basis, regardless of when SWEP is triggered.
* The capacity provided by the winter shelters will increase from 6 spaces from 1st October up to 34 spaces Jan to Mar-19 when all 3 shelters, including OWNS, are opened. Access to these facilities will be via Adult Homeless Pathway Coordination / Oxford SPOT.
* SWEP will trigger on a forecast by the Met Office of 3 consecutive days at zero degrees Celsius or below, however as in previous years, the Council has discretion to open SWEP in other adverse weather conditions, e.g. snow on the ground, extreme wind chill, and together with our partners, will take a common sense approach on decisions as to whether or not to open / continue SWEP.
* Further work is underway in readiness for winter 19/20 to examine the implications of moving to either SWEP being triggered for each single night below zero and/ or a service being available continuously throughout winter months. Either option will have significant financial and logistical challenges, such as availability of premises, that would need to be overcome.

# Introduction

## Oxford’s Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) sets out what Oxford City Council and local homelessness organisations will do to ensure there is provision of extra bed spaces for rough sleepers in the City during the cold winter months.

## There is no statutory requirement to provide shelter for rough sleepers during the winter, however it is seen as a ‘humanitarian obligation on local authorities to do all they can to prevent deaths on the streets’. Guidelines and good practice for SWEP are provided by Homeless Link[[1]](#footnote-1)

## Currently, SWEP operates on a simple overtime model which necessarily limits the capacity of the system to deliver the service more frequently, including whenever the temperature falls to zero degrees Celsius.

## This document presents a report on the findings of the SWEP review 2018, including its review of SWEP operation winter 2017/18, outlines the key elements of the SWEP Protocol for winter 2018/19 and identifies considerations for future commissioning.

# SWEP review 2018

## Each year, the Council works with local homelessness organisations involved in the delivery of SWEP to:

## Review its operation in the previous winter (2017/18) and identify any issues, problems, opportunities which may affect future delivery

# Identify what facilities and arrangements are needed to meet demand in the coming winter (2018/19) and what action and resources are required to deliver these, and confirm the SWEP Protocol

## Representatives from the following groups and organisations were involved in the review group:

# St Mungo’s – OxSPOT (Oxford Street Population Outreach Team)

# Homeless Oxfordshire – Service Provider, O’Hanlon House

# A2Dominion – Service Provider, Simon House

# The Porch – provided staffing for SWEP in 2017/18

* Thames Valley Police
* Crisis Skylight, Oxford
* Oxford Winter Night Shelter (OWNS)

## The group met on 3 occasions over the summer with separate meetings held in between. Separate meetings were held with local grassroots organisations to hear their views on SWEP. Many of their comments, particularly with regard to communications, have been taken on board as part of this year’s arrangements.

# SWEP operation winter 2017/18

## Winter 2017/18 was exceptionally cold and prolonged. This meant that SWEP opened on 8 separate occasions between the 8th of December 2017 and the 20th of March 2018 for an unprecedented 36 nights. 144 separate individuals accessed SWEP over the winter.

## The minimum intake was 5 people and the maximum intake was 41 people. The total number of SWEP stays was 827 – the highest recorded.

## Reflecting the fact that SWEP emergency bed spaces are available for anyone who would otherwise be rough sleeping on the night and that Oxford City Council provides an extensive range of accommodation for single homeless people with a connection to the City:

* Most of those accessing SWEP did not have a connection to Oxford.
* 28% had a connection to one of the other Oxfordshire Districts [Cherwell, 14%; South & Vale, 8%; West, 2%] – a slight increase on previous years
* 28% had no connection to Oxfordshire

## Usage by people from the EEA continued its downward trend from a people of 45% in 2015/16 to 25% in 2017/18.

## 15% of SWEP users were female (21/137) and 85% (116/137) Men. This is an increase in the proportion of female rough sleepers from the previous year’s SWEP operation, 2016/17 which was 12% Female and (8/67) 88% (59/67) male.

# Issues during - winter 2017/18

## The review found that SWEP successfully provided emergency accommodation to all those who needed it winter 2017/18. Client-targeted communications, including a new SWEP leaflet, from service providers together with Thames Valley Police helped to get accurate information out to potential SWEP users. Nobody was turned away and there were no fatalities on the street.

## However, there were a number of issues and challenges which impacted delivery of SWEP and need to be considered in respect of future provision, including:

* **High number of clients with complex needs and chaotic behaviour -** It was a challenge to accommodate / manage these needs within existing venues / capacity.
* **High numbers and prior knowledge of clients -** Sheer numbers and high client turnover for SWEP caused a practical challenge for Oxford SPOT and for services who lacked prior knowledge of some clients;
* **O’Hanlon House under pressure** – O’Hanlon House (OHH) took in high numbers and new clients / those with unassessed needs were referred exclusively to OHH – increasing the pressure on the service.
* **Bed space allocation -** Spaces were allocated on the basis of client need and safety considerations but clients did not always comply with this, again increasing the numbers at OHH and – on occasion - leading to empty spaces at Simon House and Richard Benson Hall.
* **Impact on staff and services -** Continued / extensive operation of SWEP placed considerable pressure on staff members and services
* **Public criticism -** There was criticism of SWEP arising from misunderstandings about how it works and what services are available to help people get / stay off the streets.
* **Dogs (perception) -** Linked to the above, there was a persistent perception that clients could not access SWEP if they had a dog. This was not the case and in the event there were no requests to access kennels despite these being available.

# Recent developments

# Oxford Winter Night Shelter (OWNS)

## During winter 2017/18 Churches in Oxford operated the rolling Oxford Winter Night Shelter (OWNS), providing 10 spaces each night between 2nd January and 31st March 2018 for people with low level needs.

## Oxford City Council worked closely with Churches in Oxford to ensure that arrangements were in place for OWNS to operate safely, including confirming that buildings were compliant with fire safety regulations and tasking OxSPOT to manage referrals into the service.

## OWNS is not technically part of the core SWEP provision, but its operation in 2017/18 undoubtedly made a significant difference to the delivery of Oxford’s winter provision. OWNS will be expanding its capacity in winter 2018/19, providing 20 spaces each night between 1st January and 31st March 2018.

# MHCLG funding for the Rough Sleeping Initiative Programme

## Since the review started the Council has been awarded MHCLG funding to enable the commissioning of two new winter shelters which will provide refuge and support to rough sleepers on a nightly basis from 1st October providing up to 14 spaces which will be available for people without a local connection to Oxford. Nine of the 14 new winter shelter spaces are available for people without recourse to public funds. Access to these facilities will be via AHPrefer / Oxford SPOT only.

## These – together with the 20 spaces provided by the Oxford Winter Night Shelter – will provide a much extended winter provision.

# SWEP Protocol - winter 2018/19

## Officers have worked with partner organisations to develop and agree an approach to SWEP delivery for winter 2018/19 which addresses the issues highlighted above.

## As in previous years, the Council will operate SWEP in partnership with local homelessness organisations, including St Mungo’s (OxSPOT), Homeless Oxfordshire, Aspire and A2Dominion.

## SWEP will open on a forecast by the Met Office that the night temperature will fall to zero or below on 3 or more consecutive nights. SWEP then opens on the first night of this period - not after 2 or 3 nights. There is also discretion to open on nights when the forecast indicates adverse weather conditions.

## As in previous years, people wishing to access SWEP will need to present at O’Hanlon House between 9pm and 9.30pm, from where they will be directed to their allocated venue. Access to SWEP venues is between 10pm and 11pm, with admissions after this time, at the discretion of the venue coordinator.

## The Protocol will deliver:

1. **Increased capacity** – increased capacity will be available across core SWEP venues, winter shelters and the recently expanded SitUp service throughout the winter
2. **Client need matched to venues** – clients will be allocated to the venue most appropriate to their assessed needs and behaviour, with capacity at O’Hanlon House and Simon House protected for those people with the most complex needs and chaotic behaviour.
3. **Effective service coordination and client engagement** – Oxford SPOT will be responsible for operational coordination and released from covering / coordinating a SWEP venue, so that they can focus their efforts on client engagement and follow up support.
4. **Effective communications** – plans are in place to improve communications around SWEP including a new infographic which will explain the SWEP process, what happens when and why
5. **Improved data and intelligence** – the Rough Sleeping & Single Homelessness (RS&SH) team is working closely with Oxford SPOT and partners to improve the quality of data available for the operation of SWEP and subsequent analysis and reporting.
6. **Reduced pressure on core services** – the measures above are designed to ease and reduce pressure on core services for rough sleepers and single homeless people at an already pressurised time of year.

## We have yet to confirm the full forecast cost of SWEP 2018/19 but this is likely to be within or close to the current budget of £30,000 with key costs attributed to: staff cover / enhancements, bedding and food, CCTV enhancement (O’Hanlon House), possible travel / accommodation allowances to enable SWEP staff to get to the venue, and the cost of supplying phones and tabards for SWEP volunteers (see below).

Volunteers & donations

## Homeless Oxfordshire has agreed to recruit, train and oversee a small group of volunteers to assist with directing people to and welcoming them at their allocated SWEP venue.

## Conscious of the fact that the public will likely want to lend their support to rough sleepers in the winter, we are also exploring how we can:

## Ensure that people who choose to engage with rough sleepers in the city, understand the process and timetable for SWEP

## Invite donations towards the organisations involved in delivering SWEP (not OCC), and include this in SWEP communications.

# Future requirements – longer term

## Work is underway in readiness for winter 19/20 to examine the implications of moving to either SWEP being triggered for each single night below zero and/ or a service being available continuously throughout winter months.

## Either option will have significant financial and logistical challenges, such as availability of premises, that would need to be overcome.

Rachel Lawrence

Rough Sleeping & Single Homelessness Manager

31st October 2018

1. Homeless Link is the national membership charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless in England. Homeless Link is the recognised source of policy and best practice guidance on key issues including SWEP and their guidance on this forms the basis of all local authorities’ policy on this. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)