



To: City Executive Board
Date: 18 December 2018
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP).
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor David Henwood, Chair of the Housing Scrutiny Panel.
Executive Board Member:	Councillor Linda Smith, Board Member for Leisure and Housing
Corporate Priority:	Meeting Housing Needs
Policy Framework:	Housing and Homeless Strategy 2018-21
Recommendation: That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendation in the body of this report.	

Appendices
Appendix 1 – Draft City Executive Board response to the recommendation

Introduction and overview

- At its meeting on 12 November 2018, the Scrutiny Committee’s Housing Panel considered a report it requested earlier in the year concerning preparations being made for the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP). The SWEP sets out what measures Oxford City Council and local homelessness organisations will put in place to provide emergency accommodation to people who are sleeping rough in instances of severe weather. The provision of SWEP is usually triggered on a forecast by the Met Office of three 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.

2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Smith, Board Member for Leisure and Housing, for attending the meeting to answer questions. The Committee would also like to thank Rachel Lawrence, Rough Sleeping and Single Homeless Manager, for supporting the meeting and producing the report. In addition, thanks are offered to Paul Reid from Aspire Oxford for contributing to the meeting.

Summary and recommendation

3. The Panel noted that the 2017/18 winter period saw the highest ever number of people accessing SWEP; a total of 141 individuals accessed SWEP, and a total of 837 nights' of accommodation were provided. Owing to additional MHCLG funding, there will be 41 more bed spaces available within the Oxford Adult Homeless Pathway for the 2018/19 winter than in the previous year. Oxford Winter Night Shelter also has an additional 10 bed spaces [total 20 spaces].
4. Officers advised the Panel at its meeting that the 2018/19 winter period would possibly be the last year when SWEP is operated on the current service model (overtime), and that more robust long term models for winter support were being explored. However, any new model of this nature would incur a significant cost to the Council.
5. The Panel heard that the availability of kennels for dogs was theoretically limitless, but the need to request kennels before 2pm on the day that SWEP is triggered can be a limit to access; noting that advanced notice is needed to allow time for the collection of any dogs. The Panel also discussed some of the challenges associated with transporting people and their possessions to the various SWEP accommodation facilities. It was clarified however that arrangements can be made at O'Hanlon Housing for people to access Taxis where required.
6. The Panel were pleased to note the Council's engagement with other organisations to gather feedback on last year's SWEP provision, and how it could improve. One of the key areas for improvement concerned communication, and ensuring there is a clear message about the time schedule for accessing SWEP. This was hindered in previous years owing to misinformation from well-intended volunteers not associated with SWEP. The Panel requested that student groups remain involved in discussions regarding SWEP.
7. Paul Reid, from Aspire Oxford, suggested to the Panel that a feedback form could be helpful in recording how people learnt about SWEP and their experiences, and the Rough Sleeping & Single Homelessness Manager confirmed that this is something that officers are looking into. Paul said this would be particularly useful in light of the discussion had concerning improving communication. It was hoped that this would help the Council and its partners to gain a better understanding of how people were informed about SWEP, and what their experiences of the service were. The Panel agreed to put this forward

as a recommendation to the City Executive Board, after Scrutiny Committee endorsement, and asked that the results of the survey come back to the Panel next year.

Recommendation 1: That the City Executive Board introduces a brief exit survey for all SWEP users to gather feedback on how they were made aware of SWEP, and their experience of accessing the service.

The Homelessness Trailblazer

8. At the same meeting, the Panel also considered the outcome of year one of the Homelessness Trailblazer. The Panel welcomed this significant piece of work, funded in the main by MHCLG, which involved collaborating with other public service providers to work as upstream as possible to identify people at risk of homelessness, and provide support. The Panel noted that this was a significant opportunity to develop a business case for pooled funding, as well as continued MHCLG funding, if the programme could continue to demonstrate its impact. The Panel asked for the outcome of year two of the programme to be reported back to them in 2019.

Further Consideration

9. The scrutiny of homelessness issues remains a cornerstone of the Housing Panel's function, and members are grateful for the work Council Officers and the Board Member have done to keep them informed, and enhance the 2018/19 winter accommodation provision. In addition to its recommendation to the City Executive Board, the Panel has asked for the new leaflets outlining the SWEP timeline to be made available to them, which may also be useful for all councillors to receive.
10. Looking to 2019, the Panel has asked to receive an update on the outcome of the 2018/19 SWEP provision, and any lessons learnt, at its 4 March meeting. This could usefully include the feedback received from the surveys, if the recommendation is taken forward. Further ahead, the Panel also wishes to review plans for winter provision in 2019/20, when officers and the Board Member are able to present such information.

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