

Briefing Note for CEB – Operation of SWEP (January update)

To be raised by Councillor Linda Smith under “Items Raised by Board Members”

Following my Motion to Full Council 26th November, officers were asked to report to CEB in January (and again in April) on the operation of SWEP this winter.

Given that the first period of SWEP opening this winter was not until 13th to 15th December and the second period of opening between 2nd and 4th January 2019, it has not been feasible for officer to assemble a full report in time to meet reporting deadlines for this CEB meeting.

I would therefore like to share with you this briefing on SWEP operation so far this winter which will then be circulated with the minutes of this meeting.

Whilst the same qualifications relating to reporting deadlines will apply in April, I am asking officers to provide as comprehensive report as possible on the operation of SWEP throughout this winter.

1 Occasions when SWEP has been triggered

1.1 At the time of writing, SWEP has so far been triggered on 3 occasions this winter:

- 13th to 15th December (3 nights, discretion exercised)
- 2nd to 4th January (3 nights)
- 17th January (1 night initially, discretion exercised and subject to review on the following day)

1.2 On two of these occasions officers exercised discretion to open SWEP even though the normal criteria for doing so – that is, a forecast of 3 or more nights at zero degrees Celsius or below - had not been met.

1.3 The reasons for this were that on the first period of opening (13th to 15th December) the temperature was forecast to fall to below zero degrees on two nights (13th & 14th December), rise above freezing on one night (15th December) but with an extremely low “feels like” temperature on this third night.

1.4 On the third period of opening (17th January), SWEP opened initially for one day only. This decision was made:

- Because of the sub-zero temperature forecast for that night
- In anticipation of the possibility that SWEP might need to stay open into and over the weekend
- With the intention that officers would review the situation the following morning (18/1) and decide then whether or not to close SWEP or continue the period of opening.

- 1.5 In the event, the decision was made to close SWEP on the morning of 18th January because there was no imminent forecast (eg. starting within the following 48 hours) for 3 consecutive nights at zero degrees Celsius or below.

2 Number of people accommodated

- 2.1 At the time of writing, figures were not yet available for the most recent opening of SWEP (17th January), however during the first two periods of opening, SWEP provided a total of 112 stays for 48 separate individuals with the maximum intake on a single night (15th December) being 24 people.
- 2.2 The vast majority of people were accommodated at O'Hanlon House and Simon House. Most SWEP users used the service on more than one occasion during periods of opening, with the average amount of stays as 2.3 per person.
- 2.3 In common with previous periods of operation, a significant proportion of SWEP users (14/48, 29%) were people who have not previously been known to services. This is an important factor for SWEP operation as people whose needs have yet to be assessed must be accommodated at the most secure venues [O'Hanlon House, Simon House].
- 2.4 Similarly, SWEP was well used by people without a known local connection to Oxfordshire (22/48, 46%) and without recourse to public funds (16/48, 33%). 8 of the 48 (17%) unique visitors to SWEP were women.

3 Availability of bed spaces in the Adult Homeless Pathway

- 3.1 During the periods when SWEP has been open this winter a total of 214 bed spaces have been commissioned in the Oxford Adult Homeless Pathway.
- 3.2 Officers work closely with accommodation providers year round to maximise bed occupancy. However, there are several reasons why from time to time a bed / room may be briefly unoccupied (void) including the need for maintenance, the temporary absence of the resident (for example due to arrest or hospital admission), and because the bed / room has been allocated to a person who has not yet arrived.
- 3.3 During the first two periods of SWEP opening this winter ...
 - 13th to 15th December – all beds / rooms were occupied with the exception of 3 units which were awaiting the imminent arrival of the allocated occupants
 - 2nd to 4th January - all beds / rooms were occupied with the exception of 8 units. Of these, 5 units were unoccupied because clients whose needs were appropriate for the service type / level had yet to be identified and 3 units where maintenance was needed before the bed / room could be re-allocated.

4 Exclusions from SWEP

- 4.1 SWEP aims to provide additional accommodation for all those who need it during extreme, adverse weather conditions. Unfortunately, during the first two periods of SWEP operation a total of 12 separate individuals were excluded from the service on one or more occasions.
- 4.2 This was because – based on the information available to them at the time – SWEP accommodation providers considered that due to their behaviour, the individuals concerned posed an unacceptable level of risk to staff, residents and other SWEP users. The identified risks included violence and threats to staff members and other service users.
- 4.3 Since then officers have met with the providers concerned and agreed an approach which includes personalised accommodation plans for the individuals concerned and increased security and safety arrangements at Simon House. This plan was implemented ahead of the 3rd period of SWEP opening (17th January 2019).
- 4.4 I am confident that these arrangements will ensure that all those in need of SWEP will be able to access the service going forward. I am asking officers to provide a full account on this matter in their report to CEB on SWEP operation in April 2019.

5 Exit survey

- 5.1 In order to learn more about individuals' experiences of SWEP and how this might be improved a new service user questionnaire has been developed. The questionnaire invites SWEP service users to:
 - Tell us where they stayed
 - Rate their experience of using the service
 - Rate the helpfulness of the SWEP staff
 - Say whether they would use SWEP again
 - Suggest what could be done to improve the service
 - Say how they found out about the service
 - Say if they would like someone to talk with them about what other help might be available
 - Tell us anything else that they think we should know
- 5.2 The questionnaire was introduced during this period but responses have so far been limited. It is hoped that more service users will be encouraged and enabled to respond during future periods of operation.

This page is intentionally left blank