

# North Tyneside Council Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) 2021 – 2022



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### **Covid 19: provision of night shelters**

**Government guidance, with advice from Public Health will be followed for the provision of night shelters for this winter's severe weather emergency protocol accommodation.**

**The guidance sets out how night shelters and communal spaces can operate safely.**

**[Covid 19 provision of night shelters](#)**

**North Tyneside Council will ensure that risk assessments for any building being used for the sit up service and individuals accommodated are in place for the provision operating. This will include establishing if those in need of the bed space have been vaccinated, and that those being accommodated must complete a Lateral Flow Test prior to accessing the service. If anyone refuses to complete a test, then the offer of the provision will be withdrawn. The following will also be provided to enable those providing the service, those occupying the provision and any other organisations who may use the buildings to remain safe:**

- **Lateral flow tests;**
- **PPE equipment;**
- **Cleaning materials, sanitiser and wipes;**
- **Screens to separate the bed spaces; and**
- **Wellness packs.**

## 1. Background

In August 2018 the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) launched their Rough Sleeping Strategy 2018, which set out their vision to halve rough sleeping by 2022 and end it by 2027.

To support this vision, annual funding has been made available to local authorities to bid for through the Rough Sleeping Initiative and Cold Weather Fund. Rough Sleeping Specialist Advisors have also been appointed to work with local authorities.

Nationally the annual rough sleeping survey return for 2020 saw a decrease of 37%. This could be attributed to the 'Everyone In' initiative that ran from March 2020 to ensure that anyone who was street homeless or who was at risk of rough sleeping was offered a place of safety during the Covid 19 pandemic. For the North East region there was an increase in rough sleepers of 7%. The only region to record an increase for 2020, rough sleeping figures remain considerably lower than other English regions. For North Tyneside, three rough sleepers were recorded, a decrease of five from 2019.

## 2. Introduction

At any time, rough sleeping or suspected rough sleeping can be reported direct to Street Link by calling 0300 500 0914 or visiting [www.streetlink.org.uk](http://www.streetlink.org.uk). This information is then forwarded to the local authority who work with their partners to investigate and verify the referral. The public can also call 0191 643 2520 or email [housingadvice@northtyneside.gov.uk](mailto:housingadvice@northtyneside.gov.uk) direct to report a rough sleeper or suspected rough sleeping.

There are no legal protections for people sleeping rough in England during severe weather and no statutory duty to provide shelter.

There is a humanitarian obligation on all local authorities to do all that they can to prevent deaths on the streets caused by severe weather, and for their partners and local communities to support this. This includes the cold, but also conditions such as high wind, heavy rain and heat.

## 3. Purpose of the protocol

This protocol sets out the arrangements that North Tyneside Council will put in place to ensure that:

- People are not at risk of dying on the streets or that no one dies on the streets during periods of severe weather.
- All rough sleepers have the opportunity to access shelter during periods of severe weather; and
- Every effort is made to engage individuals who have been or are sleeping rough with services.

## 4. What is severe weather?

There is no strict definition of 'severe weather'. Any conditions that can increase the risk of harm to people sleeping rough can be considered severe. A common sense and flexible approach should be adopted in determining when the protocol is operational. People sleeping rough may already be experiencing health issues and/or substance misuse, therefore it should not be presumed that they have become resilient to severe weather. Weather conditions include but are not exhaustive to:

- Severe cold;
- Excessive and/or prolonged rain;
- Extreme wind and associated wind chill factor;
- Snow, frost, ice and associated chill factor;
- Heatwaves; and
- A weather warning is in place that includes North Tyneside.

**Cold:** extreme cold can cause serious health problems and death for those who are exposed to it overnight or for long periods of time. Historically SWEP provision has been activated when the temperature has been forecast to be zero degrees or below for three days. The impact of rain, snow, wind chill and 'feels like' temperature should all be considered. An occasional above zero degrees in a series of sub-zero degrees nights should not deactivate the SWEP.

**Wind:** high winds can be problematic and can lead to increased injury through trees being uprooted, falling walls, roofing, and debris from buildings or walls that people may be sheltering in or against.

**Rain:** excessive or prolonged rain can lead to flooding, so those sleeping near the river, sea, drains or under bridges are at an increased risk. Lengthy exposure to extreme rain can result in health problems and the loss of belongings.

**Heatwaves:** people sleeping rough may find it difficult to access water and sun protection. This increases their risk of dehydration; sun burn and sun stroke. A different approach to SWEP is needed for this weather risk, with access to a resource during the day offering free water and sunscreen.

**Unsafe shelter:** in addition to the risks associated with severe weather, consideration should be given to the actions that people may take to take shelter from it. Unsafe shelters such as large lidded bins, and illegal entry to empty or derelict buildings may be used. Some people may increase their substance use to cope with the bad weather; this in turn can impact on their health, decision making ability, and behaviour towards and interaction with others.

## 5. 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, have recourse to public funds, have a priority housing need, have been classed intentionally homeless or have a local connection. The individual concerned must only:

- Be at risk if they continue to sleep rough during the period of severe weather;
- Have nowhere to sleep indoors during the period of severe weather; and
- Agree to assistance offered by the Council and/or its partners.

### Who are rough sleepers?

- People sleeping in the open air;
- People about to bed down (sitting down/in or standing next to their bedding in the open air;

- People actually bedded down (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments); and
- People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, derelict boats, stations or 'bashes').

### **Who are not rough sleepers?**

- People in hostels or shelters;
- Sofa surfers;
- People in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes; and
- People in an organised protest, squatters or travellers.

Risk assessments should be carried on each individual. The outcome of this assessment will determine the accommodation provision to be offered. It must be acknowledged that for some, there may be no suitable or appropriate accommodation available to them for the period SWEP is active.

Severe weather increases the risk of death or serious illness to people who sleep rough. Many entrenched rough sleepers may be resistant to services and therefore less likely to engage. This should not prevent them from being able to access accommodation.

## **6. Provision**

For this winter, an emergency sit up service will be available to anyone found to be rough sleeping or presenting as roofless. The building owner is responsible for ensuring that appropriate insurance is in place to deliver this service.

The provision will be delivered by volunteers from the Community and Voluntary Sector.

The provision will be available for occupation between the hours of 7.00pm – 08.00am. Any change to these times will be confirmed by the named service contact. If no one has been accommodated, then the volunteers may leave at 04.00am.

W.C. facilities are available.

An evening hot meal, refreshments and a breakfast provision will be provided.

The provision can accommodate a maximum of four (4) people on any one night.

Alcohol and smoking (including e-cigarettes and vapes) are not permitted within the building or the vicinity of it.

If this provision is unable to be provided for any night(s) that SWEP is operational or it is full, then it is the responsibility of the Council to source alternative, available, temporary accommodation.

Crisis beds are available within supported housing provision; the use of these bed spaces is prioritised for those who are referred to that accommodation through Support Gateway. Crisis beds will not be offered as an alternative to SWEP provision.

## **7. Volunteers**

Volunteers for the emergency sit up service will be sourced through the North Tyneside Community and Voluntary Sector.

All volunteers will be subject to enhanced DBS and be aware of organisational safeguarding and risk assessment procedures that support service provision. This includes following all Covid 19 guidance.

As the provision is indoors, volunteers must complete Lateral Flow Tests prior to covering their shift.

The health, safety, and welfare of those being accommodated and volunteers must always be maintained.

There will be a minimum of three (3) volunteers per shift.

Wherever possible the volunteers on shift will be both male and female.

## **8. Activation of the protocol**

For poor periods of winter weather, the protocol is normally active from 1 November – 31 March, however bad weather may dictate that provision is made available outside of this time.

The protocol will be activated when the actual or 'feels like' temperature is forecast to drop to zero degrees or below for three consecutive nights. This will be from the first night of the forecast. The three-night guideline is an attempt to define severe weather only and is the minimum requirement.

If the protocol is activated only for a weather warning being in place that includes North Tyneside, and no other weather factors need to be considered, activation will be for one night only, and then reviewed.

Flexibility is crucial. Common sense should prevail at all time and consideration must be given to the factors in point 4, as these may override the actual temperature.

### **8.1 Activation during office hours**

The Temporary Emergency Accommodation Team will check the weather forecast for North Tyneside (inland and coastal) at 08.30am and 14:30pm on a daily basis during the months that winter SWEP may be operational using the Meteorological Office website [www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk).

The Temporary Emergency Accommodation Team is responsible for informing all relevant voluntary and statutory sector partners, including the Council's out of hours of SWEP activation and deactivation.

### **8.2 Activation outside of office hours**

If SWEP is activated for a Friday night, it will remain active for the weekend. If SWEP is not activated for a Friday and there is an unexpected change to the weather, then the Contact Centre will check at [www.metoffice.gov.uk](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk) prior to any placement being made.

### **8.3 Activation period**

The protocol will be activated on a day by day basis. Those being accommodated, must present, or contact Housing Services the following working day, for it to be confirmed that they can access the provision for each night of activation. For out of hours, this will be through the Out of Hours Service.

### **8.4 Change in weather**

There may be occasion when there is a late change to the weather forecast or unexpected weather may occur. In these instances, there is no expectation that the winter SWEP service provision will be made available at such short notice. If anyone is found to need accommodation for the night, and the SWEP emergency sit up service is not operational, then depending on availability, alternative, available temporary accommodation will be sourced by the Council.

## **9. Referral**

Referrals for SWEP accommodation will be authorised by the Council's Temporary Emergency Accommodation Team or Out of Hour's Service.

The emergency sit up service is not direct access.

During office hours the Temporary Emergency Accommodation Team will book the accommodation and inform the service provision of who to expect. Outside of office hours, Out of Hours will book the accommodation.

The Homeless Support Officer, Single Person Support Officer and Changing Lives Homeless Response Service should also be notified of those being accommodated, so arrangements can be made to meet the individuals, if not already known to services.

Those in need of the provision may present at services that work with people who are at risk of or who are homeless. In these instances, the service provider must contact the Temporary Emergency Accommodation Team who will confirm if a place can be offered.

For anyone presenting outside of office hours, accommodation will be arranged by the Council's Out of Hour's Service.

If an individual refuses the offer of the provision:

- Ensure they have received information about the risks of the weather on their health;
- Consider if there is a cause to believe that the individual was not capable of making an informed judgement, and if appropriate make a referral to Safeguarding; and
- Inform the Homeless Support Officer, Single Person Support Officer and Changing Lives Homeless Response Service who can attempt to engage with the individual.

### **9.1 Referral update**

If anyone does not take up the accommodation booked, then the Temporary Emergency Accommodation Team must make every effort to contact the individual and/or any service they may be involved with to establish their current housing status. If an out of hours referral fails to attend then the Housing Advice Team should, if appropriate, create a triage so the person can be contacted and update any support service they may be involved with.

## **10. The Hub**

When SWEP has been active, and where possible a hub facility will operate from the emergency sit up venue the following morning (excluding weekends). The Homeless Support Officer, Single Person Support Officer and Changing Lives will be on site between 08.00am – 10.00am to meet with those accommodated.

Individuals should always be encouraged to accept and engage with the support that is available, but this is not to be a condition of them being able to access accommodation.

## **11. Review of provision**

Accommodation through activation of the protocol is not intended to be long term and move on plans should be put in place.

Verifying that an individual is rough sleeping is one approach to ensure that those in most need of the accommodation receive access to it. Verifying if someone is sleeping rough should not delay or prevent them from being offered a bed place and being able to access accommodation. A person must not be sent back on to the streets to enable verification to take place.

If the person is engaged with Housing Services, then work should actively take place by both parties to resolve the homelessness.

If any incidents of anti-social behaviour or unacceptable behaviour occur during the time the accommodation is provided, a review of the individual being accommodated will take place. This will include consideration to alternative methods to prevent rough sleeping during the severe weather whilst managing the risks.

Once the minimum temperature or chill factors are predicted to rise above zero degrees and remain so, or rain, snow, wind, or heat conditions have eased, the service provision will cease.

## **12. Financial implications**

The cost of the emergency sit up service will be agreed between North Tyneside Council, and those providing the service.

The cost of any bed and breakfast accommodation will be the establishment's standard rate.

The cost for supporting any accommodation provision arranged through SWEP will be met through budgets held by North Tyneside Council.

Invoices for the emergency sit up service must be submitted to the Temporary Emergency Accommodation Team for payment to be processed.

## **13. Monitoring and review**

The Temporary Emergency Accommodation Team will record the following information to monitor the extent of rough sleeping within North Tyneside:

- Number of occasions SWEP activated and time period of each activation;
- The severe weather reason for the activation;
- Number and composition of rough sleeper households. This will include name, age, gender, nationality, last settled address, how long been sleeping rough;
- Refusal of provision;



- Number of nights each rough sleeper accommodated;
- Verified rough sleeper;
- Number of previous contacts the rough sleeper has had with services;
- Where move on was to; and
- Any cost for emergency accommodation per night for each household.

For the emergency sit up service, meetings will take place at the following times:

- Within the month prior to SWEP being operational;
- Mid way through SWEP operating;
- Within the month after SWEP has ceased.

Issues by exception will be dealt with at the time of being raised.

The Housing Policy and Service Development Team will work with relevant partners to review the SWEP on an annual basis to ensure that:

- The needs of the rough sleeper are met during periods of severe weather; and
- Government priorities are reflected.

#### **14. Contact information**

Housing Advice Team:	0800 011 6511
Homeless Support Officer:	0191 643 7927
Temporary Accommodation	0191 643 6111
Out of Hours Support:	0191 643 1870
(6.00pm – 07.30am Monday - Friday)	0800 011 6511
(6.00pm – 07.30am Friday – Monday)	
Housing Policy and Service Development:	0191 643 6212

