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Helping People who are Sleeping Rough in Lincolnshire

A guide to implementing Lincolnshire's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)



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What is a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP)?

SWEP is a voluntary process that is put in place by district housing authorities to ensure that people sleeping rough are not at risk of harm or, in the worst case, of dying during periods of extreme cold or severe weather.

The seven Lincolnshire Districts have arrangements in place to prevent and respond to rough sleeping at all times of the year. The purpose of SWEP however is to ensure that a place of safety is available during severe weather conditions for those people sleeping rough who may not normally be eligible for statutory services. It also includes those people who have a long history of sleeping rough and have refused previous interventions from homelessness and support services, or who choose to continue sleeping rough.

Why is SWEP needed?

The government encourages all Councils to have SWEP arrangements in place. It is not a statutory duty. At the very basic level SWEP is in place to prevent harm and ensure that no one dies on the streets during cold and severe weather. However it also gives services the opportunity to engage with individuals who have previously resisted engagement with health, wellbeing and support services.

Who does it cover?

To ensure a humanitarian response in severe weather, SWEP operates outside of the usual eligibility and entitlement frameworks that govern access to housing. Therefore, SWEP will target particularly vulnerable individuals on the basis of need and not on-going housing entitlement. It is applied to people who would otherwise be excluded from services, including those:

- with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and Non-UK EEA Nationals
- who have previously been excluded, banned or evicted from accommodation due to their behaviours
- with no local connection
- without rough sleeper verification who have not previously had contact with outreach services and/or support



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What are the aims of SWEP?

SWEP aims to:

- Prevent harm or death amongst anyone sleeping rough during severe weather
- Provide shelter for people sleeping rough who under normal circumstances would not be owed a statutory duty under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, or who would not normally engage with services
- Prevent those accessing SWEP provision from having to return to the streets
- Assist people sleeping rough who use the SWEP provision to access other support services to meet their needs

When is SWEP activated?

The guiding principles are that SWEP arrangements will be in place during any period of severe or extreme weather.

SWEP arrangements are usually triggered when the night time temperature is predicted to be zero degrees Celsius or below for three consecutive nights. Consideration will be given to implementing SWEP when exceptionally cold, inclement or extreme weather is forecast that falls short of this definition, this could include periods of extreme heat, rain and/or wind.

Who is involved in delivering SWEP?

The main organisations responsible for delivering the protocol are:

- Boston Borough Council
- City of Lincoln Council
- East Lindsey District Council
- North Kesteven District Council
- South Holland District Council
- South Kesteven District Council
- West Lindsey District Council

In all cases the district councils work closely with various partners including;

- Street Outreach Teams
- Lincolnshire County Council Emergency Planning



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- Lincolnshire Police
- Probation
- Hospital Discharge Teams
- Registered Local Providers
- Voluntary and charitable organisations
- Private landlords
- Health services
- Asylum Accommodation Support Providers

When SWEP arrangements are activated, awareness raising will be carried out to ensure that members of the public and partner organisations are urged to report concerns regarding people who might be sleeping rough. Arrangements will be published through various platforms and could include the district councils' intranet, external website and various social media platforms. This will ensure that partner organisations and members of the public are given clear and straight forward advice on how they can help people who are sleeping rough during these periods.

Procedure Guide

Stage 1 – SWEP arrangements are triggered

SWEP will be consistently triggered / deactivated in Lincolnshire wherever possible but as the county spans a wide area there will be circumstances where temperatures vary. If SWEP is triggered, each district has an agreed list of key contacts that will be notified when SWEP is activated or deactivated. The Lincs Housing Partnerships Manager will then notify countywide contacts as appropriate.

From October to March each district council will be responsible for checking the three day forecast every day before 10:00am. The measurement will be taken from the Met Office website. This is the link: <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/>. For extreme weather outside of this period a decision to activate SWEP will be made as required.

Once a decision to activate SWEP has been taken it will stand until the following day's check. The service will be reviewed on a daily basis with a commitment made every morning to open for further nights based on the forecast for the next three days. A decision will be made by 10:00am on Friday morning as to whether SWEP will be activated over the weekend.

When the protocol is to be triggered, the district council will inform the Street Outreach Teams by 10.00 am that day and will ensure that their website and other appropriate social media are updated.



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Each council's website will provide details of who to contact if a member of the public comes across someone who is sleeping rough during the severe weather.

Each council's out of hours service will also be contacted to advise that SWEP has been triggered.

Asylum eviction pause

Pausing evictions for up to 72 hrs for service users due to be evicted from Asylum Accommodation Support Contract accommodation allows local authorities to prioritise existing rough sleepers into overnight accommodation.

The pause to enforced evictions for up to 72hrs during a SWEP supports local authorities with a humanitarian obligation in order to prevent death. The process has been agreed on the basis that this local government procedure is put in place to mitigate risks against people sleeping rough when there is an increased risk of death due to the weather, for example in the winter when temperatures fall near or below freezing.

For clarity, if a local authority does not activate SWEP on the basis described above, then the requirement to pause enforced evictions to allow for an 'everyone in' event during a period of cold weather cannot be activated. For example, if a SWEP is in place continuously for several months, regardless of weather forecast.

72hr Time-scale clarification

The visual aid in appendix 2 has been provided to clearly set out qualifying periods and timescales in relation to the 72hr pause. This serves as confirmation that an individual SU will be paused for up to 72hrs – if their eviction date falls during a SWEP it is for up to 72 hrs from the date the eviction was due to take place (not the SWEP start date)

SWEP Notifications – Activation/deactivation

Local Authorities should continue to notify the Home Office and Providers in their area when SWEP activation has been triggered, including start date and when it will be stood down.

Stage 2 – How a Person who is Sleeping Rough is identified



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A person sleeping rough could also be identified through a report from a member of the public or a partner organisation.

This protocol requests an enhanced commitment from the following services to actively identify and refer people who are sleeping rough in Lincolnshire for additional support during periods of severe weather:

- Lincolnshire County Council
- Lincolnshire Police
- All local Registered Providers including supported housing providers
- Probation
- Hospital and Health teams
- Voluntary, Charitable and Faith groups

The role of the above organisations will be particularly important in identifying people sleeping rough and ensuring that they have been referred to appropriate services during periods of severe weather. A person sleeping rough can be notified to the relevant district council (numbers at end of document).

Any known or obvious details about the person should be noted by the contacting person/agency. This includes their gender, estimated age, any obvious vulnerabilities they might have, any known risks, the location they were identified at or last seen in and whether it is thought that they are new to the street or have been sleeping rough for a longer period.

Stage 3 – Response to reports

Where it is reasonable to believe that the person is sleeping rough, they have nowhere safe to stay and they agree to assistance then the district council will attempt to arrange emergency temporary accommodation.

The district council will arrange for an interview/assessment for the service user the following day. The intention will be to assist them into accommodation and/or access necessary services such as Health, Department of Work and Pensions, support, etc.

For reports to District Councils' Out of Hours Teams made out of office hours:

The needs of the person sleeping rough will be assessed over the phone either by talking to the referral agency or where possible the person themselves. Where it is reasonable to believe that the person is sleeping rough, they have nowhere safe to stay and they agree to assistance, then emergency temporary accommodation will be sought.



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The Out of Hours Teams will send notification to the Housing Team of any placement made out of hours. This will then be followed up the following day by arranging for an interview/assessment for the service user. The intention will be to assist them into accommodation and/or accessing necessary services such as Health, Department of Work and Pensions, support, etc.

Stage 4 – The Provision of Temporary Accommodation

Each district council will seek to arrange emergency temporary accommodation or shelter for anyone identified as sleeping rough when SWEP arrangements are in place. This will enable the opportunity to work with the person to explore accommodation options to prevent a return to the street. It will also provide some available time to address issues such as health and financial difficulties. Accommodation will vary between districts depending on available placements.

Each district will ensure that the service user completes a Housing Benefit application form (where applicable). The officers will help them to provide verification for this claim and will also assist them to claim personal benefits that they may not be receiving.

Risk Management

If 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 service user or who could carry out relevant assessments and provide further support.

Each district will review the situation jointly with relevant partners to determine whether any other form of shelter could be provided during the time that SWEP is in place. This will take into account issues around managing the risk associated with the service user. Whilst every possible attempt will be made to find suitable shelter, in rare incidences where the risk is unmanageable, some people may have to be barred from provision under SWEP.

Each district must ensure that the terms of this arrangement are made clear to the service user, providing information verbally and if possible, in writing. Most importantly they must be made aware that this accommodation will only be provided during the extreme weather conditions, however further advice and assistance will be available to them to try and help them to find long term accommodation and access other services.

Stage 5 – SWEP arrangements are deactivated



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The operation of SWEP arrangements will be reviewed on a daily basis with a decision being made every morning (as per stage 1) as to whether arrangements will be in place for a further night. SWEP arrangements will normally be deactivated when the minimum night time temperature is predicted to rise above zero degrees Celsius for two or more consecutive nights or when severely inclement weather conditions have ceased. When the decision has been taken to deactivate, all forms of communication will be updated accordingly. Each district council will inform their list of key contacts by 10.00 am that day.

Once SWEP arrangements have been deactivated, emergency temporary accommodation will no longer be provided. The service user will be offered housing options and assistance to deal with their longer term issues of homelessness.

Where a person who has been accommodated under SWEP but does not have a local connection and has come from another area of the UK or another country, the district will make the relevant enquiries and assist them to reconnect to their local community if it is safe to do so.

Financial Position

The cost of providing emergency accommodation during SWEP will be met from existing district council resources. Such costs will be recovered through the submission of Housing Benefit claims where applicable for any accommodation provided. In circumstances where Housing Benefit is not possible the cost will not pass to the client. Eligibility for Universal Credit is not a requirement for accessing SWEP accommodation.

Transport may be provided for the individual if they are unable to walk to the accommodation secured for them if it is not a reasonable distance or they do not have the funds to pay for public or private transport. The council will make all reasonable attempts to arrange and pay for this travel. If the placement is arranged through the out of hour's emergency service they will also arrange this provision where appropriate.

Monitoring

The following information should be recorded where possible and used to monitor the use of SWEP and the outcomes achieved for those rough sleepers accessing the service.

- Number, age, gender and nationality of the service user
- Number of nights accommodated for each service user
- The cost of emergency accommodation per night for each service user
- Exit outcome for each service user



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Each District should collate this information and ensure it is utilised to review SWEP provision throughout the winter and particularly in April each year. This will enable any improvements or changes in practice to be identified for the following year.

Review

This Protocol will be reviewed by the Lincolnshire Homelessness Strategy Group on an annual basis.



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Appendix 1

South Holland District Council

Homelessness Out of Hours : 0808
100 0210
Housing Advice / Needs: contact via
SHDC
Switchboard : 0808 100 0210
Email:
housingoptions@sholland.gov.uk

Boston Borough Council

Homelessness Out of Hours: 01205 362151
Housing Advice/Needs: 01205 314200
HmelessTeamBBC@boston.gov.uk

North Kesteven District Council

Homelessness Out of Hours: 01529
308308
Housing Options: contact via NKDC
switchboard: 01529 414155
Email: housingoptions@n-kesteven.gov.uk

South Kesteven District Council

Homelessness Out of Hours: 01476 590044
Housing Advice/Needs: contact via SKDC
switchboard : 01476 406080
Email: housingadvice@southkesteven.gov.uk

West Lindsey District Council

Homelessness Out of Hours: 01427
613960
Home Choices Team contact via
WLDC switchboard: 01427 676676
Email: HomeChoices@west-lindsey.gov.uk

City of Lincoln Council

Homelessness Out of Hours: 01522 534737
For housing advice contact the Property Shop:
01522 873777
Private Sector Housing Team: 01522 873787
Email: lincolnroughsleeping@lincoln.gov.uk

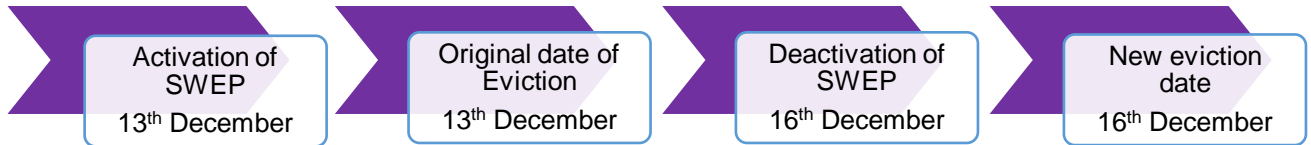
East Lindsey District Council

Homelessness Out of Hours: 01507
601111
Housing Hub: 01507 613135
Email: RSI@e-lindsey.gov.uk

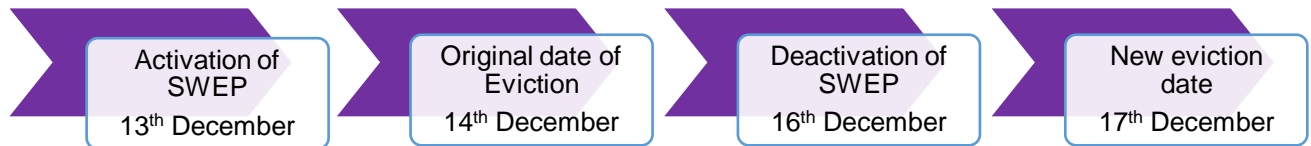


Appendix 2

Scenario 1: If a Service User is due to be evicted on the day a SWEP comes into force, the 72 hour pause starts at the point the SWEP is activated.



Scenario 2: If a Service User is due to be evicted at any point where the SWEP period is already active, the 72 hour pause starts on the day of eviction. To note: the pause is for a maximum of 72 hours.



Scenario 3: If a Service User is due to be evicted on day 4 of an active SWEP period and the SWEP is deactivated on day 5 the pause would no longer be valid, and the eviction would take place on day 5.

