

Mid Devon District Council

Housing Options

Activation of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) and Extended Winter Protocol

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September 2015

Version Control Sheet

Title: Activation of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) and Extended Winter Protocol – Housing Options

Purpose: To review the provisions available to Homeless applicants within Mid Devon District during the winter months.

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Consultation This document was sent out for consultation to the following:

Management Team
Cabinet Member
PDG Decent and affordable Homes

Document History

This document obtained the following approvals.

Title	Date	Version Approved
Head of Service		
Management Team		
PDG Decent and Affordable Home		
Cabinet		
Council		
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1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Devon and Cornwall Rough Sleeper Partnership (DCRSP) has been operational since 2011. Its membership is made up of Local Authorities, Street Outreach Providers, Homeless Link and other voluntary organisations providing services to rough sleepers throughout Devon and Cornwall.
- 1.2 The aim of the group is to provide a co-ordinated service to rough sleepers who migrate through the two counties ensuring that they are supported in a positive and appropriate way.
- 1.3 In November 2012 a young women aged 21 who was sleeping rough in Exeter died when a tree fell on her tent during a storm. Two men, aged 27 and 35, were also injured in the incident.
- 1.4 These tragic events led to the DCRSP developing the Activation of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) and Extended Winter Provision incorporating No Second Night Out (NSNO) reconnection principles. The Devon and Cornwall Housing Options Partnership (DCHOP) have now drafted a briefing paper to help prevent future incidents.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 Members of the DCHOP recognise that local areas should have adequate provision to prevent rough sleeping at any time of the year, however, the winter period often presents greatest risks to people's health. The winter period also provides increased opportunities to engage with entrenched rough sleepers and other hard-to-reach groups, as they may be more likely to accept support at this time of the year. This protocol therefore has two aims:
 - I. To ensure that no one dies on the streets due to extreme cold or severe weather
 - II. To ensure that every effort is made to engage individuals with support services during the winter months.
- 2.2 There is no strict definition of what constitutes severe weather, but Local Housing Authorities should proactively react to any weather that could increase the risk of serious harm to people sleeping rough and put measures in place to minimise this. This includes extreme cold, wind and rain. It is important not to presume when, or in what form, severe weather will occur. A common sense approach should be taken.
- 2.3 The intention of this protocol is that Local Housing Authorities across Devon and Cornwall will standardise the system for activation of the SWEP and extended winter provision. It is not intended to affect the type of accommodation provided by each local area.

3.0 When should this protocol be activated?

- 3.1 This protocol will be activated during the winter months when the Met Office issues a RED warning for severe weather or extreme cold.

4.0 Who should receive assistance?

- 4.1 SWEP and the extended winter provision will operate outside the usual eligibility and entitlement frameworks that govern access to housing. Assistance should be applied to all those who may otherwise be excluded from services; people with no recourse to public funds, people who have previously been banned and those with no local connection. Targeting of particular individuals should be on the basis of need and not on-going housing entitlement and, where possible, authorities should work closely with outreach teams to identify and target those who are known to be rough sleeping.
- 4.2 Where individuals have not been verified by outreach teams, all attempts should be made to confirm homelessness. Only once a non-priority decision has been made, or a judgement that this decision is likely to be made, should accommodation options be considered under SWEP.

5.0 Reconnection consideration

- 5.1 For clients who are, or likely to be, considered as non-priority, the Devon and Cornwall NSNO reconnection principles could be invoked.
- 5.2 The reconnection principles state that the purpose of reconnection is to allow rough sleepers, particularly new arrivals, to return in a planned way to an area where they have accommodation, support networks and some other connection in order to provide the best chance for moving away from a street lifestyle to a more settled life.
- 5.3 It will not be appropriate to reconnect every rough sleeper or single homeless person with out-of-area connections. An individual not having a local connection with the area where they present should not be an obstacle to being assessed and offered advice and assistance which may include support with a referral to services in their local area. Where a local housing authority has accepted a duty to secure accommodation for a rough sleeper or single homeless person under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996, *reconnections principles should not be applied*.
- 5.4 As part of a range of measures in place to tackle rough sleeping, reconnection plays an important role in reducing rough sleeping and it helps to:
- I. Prevent people rough sleeping at an early stage from becoming entrenched.
 - II. Enable people to move away from the street through accessing accommodation and support in a known area.
 - III. Ensure agencies provide a coordinated multi agency approach to support.

IV. Ensure that there are enough resources to meet local need.

5.5 When considering reconnection, SWEP service providers, in conjunction with outreach teams as appropriate, will undertake to follow the Devon and Cornwall reconnection principles as set out below:

- I. To identify new rough sleepers and reconnect rapidly before individuals become entrenched in a street lifestyle.
- II. To ensure that appropriate accommodation and support is arranged prior to the reconnection.
- III. To raise awareness of the difficulties of remaining on the streets in an area where they do not have support in place.
- IV. To challenge services in the area people are connected with, to take responsibility for supporting them.
- V. Reconnection can include a wide range of interventions including reconnections to family, friends, supported accommodation projects, LA temporary accommodation, tied work with accommodation, therapeutic communities, detox or rehab programs.
- VI. Reconnection can be national or international destinations.
- VII. Reconnection involves building an offer for each individual that is credible and realistic, based on assessment and includes the support required to ensure that the individual will not have to sleep rough.
- VIII. In some cases people will refuse the offer of reconnection and a multi-agency approach will need to take place to ensure the offer is reiterated. It may need to be reviewed at a later point if circumstances change.
- IX. If an individual cannot return due to a threat in the area they have left, which is evidenced through contact with the police or other agencies in that area, then the area where the individual is presenting should provide support and accommodation.

6.0 People refusing assistance

6.1 Services often report difficulties in persuading some individuals to access accommodation. These people should always be provided with information about health risks associated with severe weather, which are increased if they are using substances. Continued monitoring and support to rough sleepers who refuse to accept shelter could be provided by outreach teams, with frequent visits, offer of provisions and information about services. Individuals can be encouraged to access SWEP facilities, even if they chose not to sleep in the shelter – however priority will be given to those clients who are accessing services. In extreme weather or cold circumstances and continued refusal of accommodation, it may be appropriate to consider a rough sleeper's mental capacity in conjunction with the Police and other Statutory Agencies.

7.0 Definitions

Winter months - 1 November to 31 March

Extreme cold - The Met office has forecast that the temperature will be at zero or below for 3 consecutive nights

Severe weather - The Met Office issues a RED warning for the local area in relation to rain, snow or wind. However, Local Authorities may wish to activate this protocol when there are AMBER warnings.

8.0 Recent Statistics:

8.1 In 2014 a total of 143 local rough sleepers were included in the return to Homeless Link, with 103 in Devon and 40 in Cornwall. This had increased by 4.4%, from a total in 2013 of 137, with 60 in Devon and 77 in Cornwall. The increase in Devon is particularly significant at 71.7%, whereas in Cornwall there has been a decrease of almost 50%.

8.2 The breakdown of counted rough sleepers by LA area for 2010 – 2014 is shown in Figure 1 below.

Area	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Cornwall	80	88	50	77	40
East Devon	3	9	5	4	6
Exeter	21	29	30	23	34
Mid Devon	0	5	3	1	4
North Devon	12	16	11	7	11
Plymouth	9	18	10	9	14
South Hams	5	6	7	8	7
Teignbridge	3	8	4	0	4
Torbay	6	4	6	5	16
Torrige	10	4	4	3	4
West Devon	3	3	2	0	3
D & C Total	152	190	132	137	143
National total	1768	2181	2309	2414	2744

8.3 This report has been compiled from data gathered from the rough sleeper count, using the HRIA (housing risk impact assessment) tool, which is now in use by the Housing Options teams and partners across the Devon district council areas, for individuals with complex needs.

8.4 More information on Devon and Cornwall Rough Sleeping Statistics can be obtained from the Housing Options Manager at Mid Devon District Council.