

SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCY: SECOND EDITION

Our second investigation into how prepared homelessness systems in the UK are for climate emergency



A Museum of Homelessness investigation, 2026

These investigation findings were published in March 2026, but cover the period 2022 - 2024.

The investigation was carried out by Billie Gay Jackson, David Kristian Smith and Jess and Matt Turtle.

Thanks to the Simon Community and Streets Kitchen for contributing evidence for the investigation.

Publication design by Jess Turtle

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ABOUT THIS INVESTIGATION



“There is no legal requirement for Local Authorities to provide shelter for everyone during severe weather. However, it is widely accepted that there is a humanitarian obligation to provide SWEP and prevent death.”
Homeless Link

Terminology

- SWEP is Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, a local authority's temporary response to the risks from severe weather focused on people affected by homelessness.
- *Severe Weather Emergency* is the name of this investigation.
- CHAIN is the Combined Homelessness and Information Network database.
- NRPF is No Recourse to Public Funds. An immigration rule which prevents people from accessing welfare benefits and other forms of support.
- In for Good is the principle under which once a person is supported to access shelter or accommodation, they are not asked to leave until there is a support plan in place to end their rough sleeping.
- Conditionality means being required to meet certain criteria or behave a certain way in order to receive help.

ABOUT THIS INVESTIGATION

Our focused work in this area started back in 2022, sparked by the July heatwave in that year. At that time, London and much of the UK saw temperatures of 40 degrees. During the period, we at Museum of Homelessness carried out rapid response street work. We became concerned about the clear lack of planning for climate emergency and homelessness. We set out to try and find out what was in place and it quickly became obvious there was no data set tracking local authority responses.

Due to the lack of available information, we set out to gather it ourselves and we called the investigation *Severe Weather Emergency*. Underneath this was real concern - our work monitoring the deaths of people experiencing homelessness was tracking more deaths in summer than winter, so it felt scary to know that so little was being recorded or done in reference to heat and climate change.

This is our second *Severe Weather Emergency* investigation, and it seeks to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of a very specific measure councils should activate when temperatures become extreme – namely Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (hereafter referred to as SWEP).

For *Severe Weather Emergency 2020-2022* we asked for SWEP activation data from 91 councils between summer 2020 and summer 2022. This edition, *Severe Weather Emergency II* repeats the process for 2022 to 2024 offering us a direct opportunity to compare how things are changing over time.

We published *Severe Weather Emergency 2020-2022* in early March 2023 and since then a lot has changed. However, some things seem to have stayed the same. We also know more and can say more about the SWEP system than we were able to three years ago.

ABOUT THIS INVESTIGATION

Shortly after our 2023 report was published, the UKHSA issued guidance that was adopted by the Greater London Authority as part of their Heat SWEP guidance (H-SWEP) (1).

The 2022 heatwave also got a lot of other people talking. Dr Shakoor Hajat's influential longitudinal study, carried out with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine was key to influencing better understandings of the risks. This study revealed an evidence base that showed that mortality rates rise after temperatures exceed 25 degrees C.(2)

The publication of material, guidance and good practice guidelines has followed by a range of organisations which we are pleased to see. However, we still believe that SWEP should be more robustly implemented and more consistent. The results of our latest investigation give some indication of how it's going. *Severe Weather Emergency 2022-2024* reveals some very worrying and often dehumanising tendencies in the way councils implement SWEP. This investigation explores some of the detail of this, highlighting how the system can be inhumane and conditional. A major finding therefore, in this investigation is that there is a stark gap between a genuine, compassionate and trauma conscious approach and what is implemented.

However, despite this, the findings also highlight a general positive trend of councils being more aware and proactive around the issue of SWEP and being prepared for a broader implementation of extreme weather responses.

MoH envisions SWEP to be a mandatory and statutory obligation that each council implements, with a range of safe and flexible responses to severe weather that prioritise safety first. We are some way from that and far too many councils are working on the basis of policies that advance stigmatising views and processes towards the homeless population. We hope this latest edition of *Severe Weather Emergency* can move the dial a bit further towards a compassionate and humanitarian direction.

CURRENT CONTEXT: WHY THIS MATTERS

The threat of changing forms of extreme weather has remained. Following this guidance, 2024 saw some of the wettest months on record. (3) This was capped by Storm Henk in early 2024 which flooded several regions of the UK. More recently, 2025 was recorded as the warmest on record with 2025 Storm Éowyn also being noted as one of the most severe wind storms this century. (4)

Whilst we have seen progress, systems are still not fit for purpose.

At the time of writing this report, January 2026, there were two examples in Manchester and London which demonstrate this.

In January this year, The Manchester Evening News reported on the death of Anthony Horn. Anthony was reticent about going into a SWEP accommodation place in Manchester and the reporting singled out sit-up services as a problem for people sleeping rough in Manchester, according to the people sleeping on the streets.

We found 11 instances of councils using sit-up services in the UK.



Image: Tent in snow, 2018

CURRENT CONTEXT: WHY THIS MATTERS

On the 6th January 2026 the GLA deactivated it's pan London SWEP offer despite snow falling on the ground and temperatures remaining very low. It was reactivated on the Friday. This is an example of short-burst SWEP that we have criticised London councils for before.

During this period Haringey Council kept their SWEP open. With London at it's highest level of rough sleeping since records began, we urge all local authorities to implement the recommendations in this report.



MAYOR OF LONDON



SWEP DEACTIVATION – 06/01/2026

SWEP IS NO LONGER ACTIVE

Met Office forecasts expect temperatures above 0°C across London from the night of the date above. As such, **SWEP has been deactivated**.

Please refer to the 'In for Good' principle regarding best practice for on-going engagement with people who have already accessed SWEP.

Streets Kitchen have highlighted repeated and consistent dates that people were left on the street during SWEP in Camden. For example 112 people were counted in the early morning of 3 Jan 2026 (6). Camden did not provide this investigation with any data about when they activate SWEP. This demonstrates a real system failing in one of London's boroughs with the highest homelessness population and requires urgent action.

Examples such as these show us how much work there is to do to challenge bad practice and prevent loss of life.



Image: MoH volunteer during SWEP, 2026

ABOUT THE DATA

We sent Freedom of Information requests to 91 Local Authorities across England and Wales. The sample size reflects a desire to capture information from areas where it can be reasonably ascertained that there is a population of people sleeping rough. The sample also represents a decent overall percentage (in this case nearly one third) of all councils in England and Wales.

Areas were chosen on the basis that they were:

- In one of the top 50 populated cities in the UK.
- Had a rough sleeping count of 15 people based on 2021 Government figures (7) (NB: We used the same sample of councils in the 2022-24 study to compare results.)
- All London boroughs were included.

Our approach is to focus on emergency responses from a statutory authority. In our FOI request we ask questions that are designed to offer insights into the quality of a SWEP offer, the safety and accessibility of the offer, the broadness of the response and the barriers and comms people face in accessing SWEP in their area.

In so doing we can assess whether provision is improving and map changes over time as well as make suggestions about how things might improve.

PERIOD INVESTIGATED:

AUG 2022

JULY 2024

Since we are receiving official figures from a Local Authority area, we can assume a degree of confidence in what we are reporting. Nevertheless, some caution must be emphasised. Whilst most councils responded to our investigation, some offered responses that were either lacking in detail or demonstrated inconsistent understandings of SWEP.



ABOUT THE DATA

Whilst an incomplete response is revealing, it can also hinder an investigation. For example, in the 2020 – 2022 study, Stoke-on-Trent provided start dates for when it's SWEP was activated but didn't have end dates for some entries making it impossible to know number of days they activated SWEP in total.

These kinds of anomalies occur often due to the size of a local authority, it's population, geography and other factors. It can therefore mean that comparing one authority with another is tricky. A considerable amount of work has gone into making sure that what we present is useful and can be utilised without us drawing conclusions that are unfair or artificial.

Scope of investigation:

- Desk research.
- Freedom of Information requests and analysis.
- Submissions and testimony from grassroots organisations who we work with.
- Consultation with people experiencing homelessness at community meetings, in our shelter at the museum and on street work.



FINDINGS: OVERALL

Our overall findings are that delivery of SWEP across local authorities in England and Wales has changed significantly since the last investigation, with some positive developments and some worrying trends. As with the last investigation, we saw a wide variety of responses to SWEP, with some having very limited protocol in place and others demonstrating sophisticated and thorough responses.

We continue to see evidence that UK homelessness systems are not yet fully ready for climate emergency, but we note a higher prevalence of councils looking to plan for changes in extreme weather. Some documents we saw demonstrated that councils had a sophisticated understanding of heat related health risks. However, by far the majority of SWEP responses occur in the winter, still.

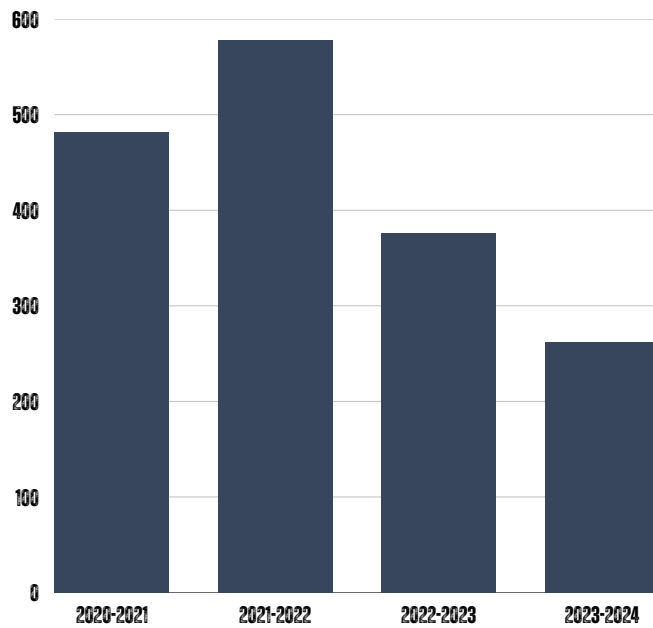
Another key finding for this investigation *Severe Weather Emergency 2022-2024* is that more councils are activating SWEP overall and more councils have better and more effective SWEP protocols in place.

In addition, we see evidence that councils are willing to activate SWEP for longer periods of time. In our last investigation we saw many councils only activating SWEP for limited bursts of time and this has changed. We explore this in more detail in the 'quality of offer' section.

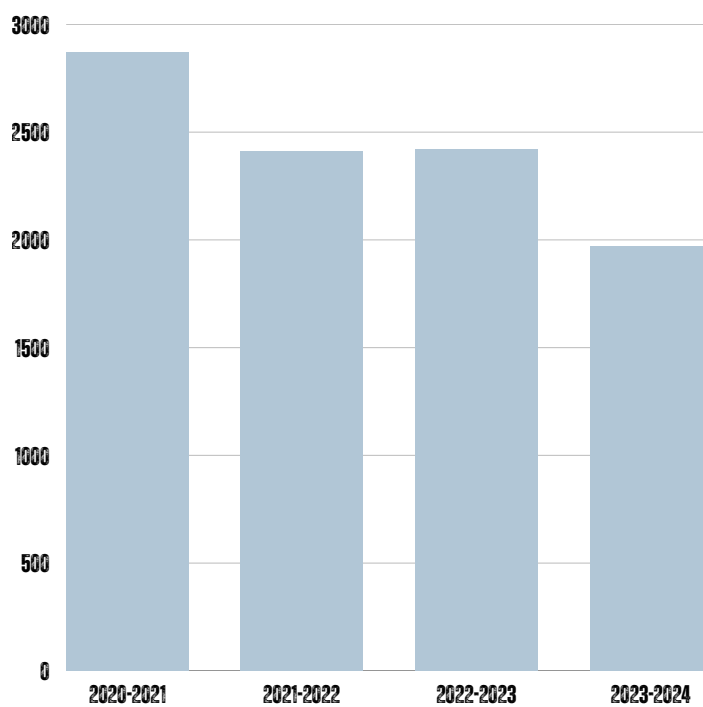


The screenshot shows a GOV.UK guidance page. The header includes the GOV.UK logo and a navigation menu. The breadcrumb trail reads: Home > Health and social care > Public health > Health protection > Emergency response. The main heading is 'Guidance' followed by 'Supporting vulnerable people before and during hot weather: people experiencing homelessness and sleeping rough'. Below this, a list of SWEP actions is provided: 'Hot SWEP at the museum today.', 'During the hottest part of the day, 12 - 3pm we will be sharing', 'Shade', 'Cool indoor space', 'Water', 'Sunscreen', 'Ice lollies', and 'Electrolytes'. The Museum of Homelessness logo is visible in the bottom right corner of the page content. A large thermometer graphic is overlaid on the right side of the page, showing a temperature of approximately 35°C (95°F).

FINDINGS: OVERALL



NUMBER OF ACTIVATIONS



NUMBER OF DAYS

FINDINGS: OVERALL

In *Severe Weather Emergency 2020-2022*, we found that 26% of the councils in the study did not activate SWEP, or said they responded to extreme weather but were unable to provide a SWEP protocol, dates, information about the offer or on the number of people assisted.

This has dropped to 13% in *Severe Weather Emergency 2022-2024*. Furthermore, of that 13%, most of those authorities analysed either did not reply to our survey or provided information that was very vague or unclear. We therefore treat the 13% with caution as it does not necessarily mean that those councils don't respond to adverse weather. Therefore, it is clear in most of the responses that there is a system of response to extreme weather barring some exceptions.

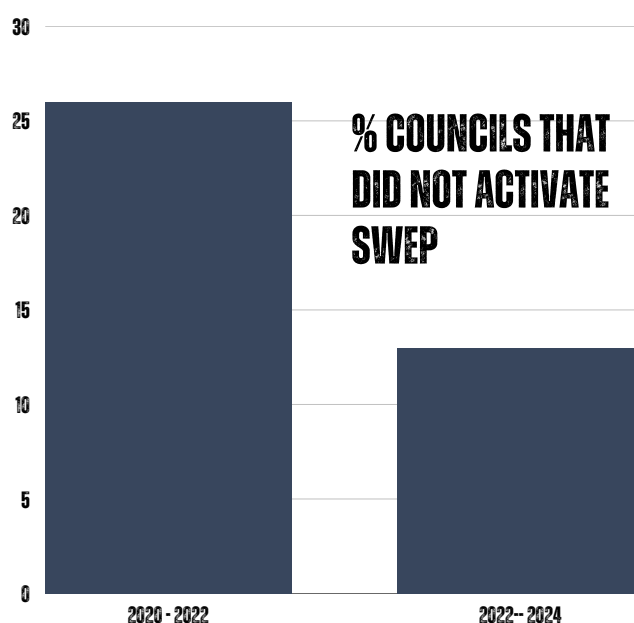


Image: MoH volunteers in a cold snap, 2021

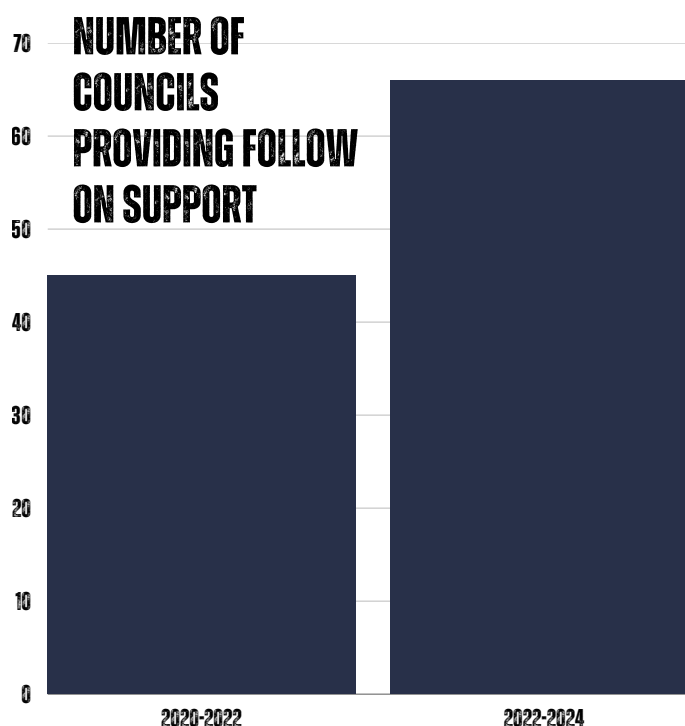


FINDINGS: OVERALL

FOLLOW ON SUPPORT

66 councils offered follow-on support through continuing to offer bedspaces beyond the period. This is a marked improvement on the previous set of findings, where only 45 councils did this.

About two thirds of all councils either had an active SWEP policy process or were drafting one.



Terminology

- SWEP is Severe Weather Emergency Protocol
- Activation is the opening of SWEP to new referrals
- Deactivation is the closing of SWEP to new referrals
- Pan-London activation is the centrally coordinated activation of SWEP by the GLA across all
- London's boroughs and including GLA overflow provision
- Overflow provision is GLA-funded SWEP provision accessible by all London boroughs when local provision reaches capacity
- In for Good is the principle under which once a person is supported to access shelter or accommodation, they are not asked to leave until there is a support plan in place to end their rough sleeping.

FINDINGS: OVERALL

CONTINUING CONCERNS

We remain concerned about councils operating SWEP provision that is over-bounded and conditional. This is explored much more in the subsequent sections of this report. Furthermore, we also continue to have concerns over poor recording of information and systems that aren't fit for purpose. Finally, whilst we can see that more councils are talking about and implementing SWEP policies, we can see some evidence that SWEP is not activated as consistently as it should be.

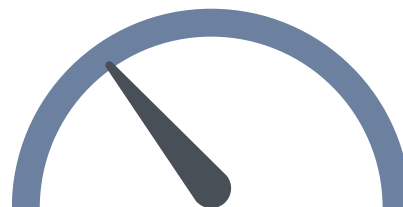
NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE

A few major towns and cities responded to us highlighting a worrying lack of SWEP provision or blatant inability to provide any information. There remains a core small-scale set of Local Authority Areas – often with significant populations - where this remains the case.

For example, in Southend on Sea, we were told that the council had taken part in severe weather telcons with police and EA to prepare for severe weather, but informed us that the weather in Southend-on-Sea had never met the threshold for SWEP.

In Southampton we were told that following a search of paper and electronic records the council established that the information we requested was not held by Southampton City Council because their homelessness records do not specify separate placements made for SWEP purposes or as “business as usual” placements. They could not answer our questions.

In Swansea, SWEP was referred to as being activated as per the extreme weather plan, but their plan itself made no reference to SWEP.



30% OF COUNCILS COULD NOT SAY HOW MANY PEOPLE THEY HAD ASSISTED

A further 5 returned a '0' figure for numbers assisted. In many cases we found that councils were unable to tell us how many times they had activated SWEP and for how many days.

We noticed a similar trend in research carried out by Carbon Brief to assess Local Authority Heat activations of SWEP in 2025. Carbon Brief wrote to 93 councils and 20 councils could not provide information and five did not reply. (8)



FINDINGS: OVERALL

We carefully assessed each response for effectiveness and thoroughness of activation dates and can see that numbers of SWEP activations and days active for appear to have dropped in the last two years.

Year	Activations	Days
2020-2021	482	2871
2021-2022	578	2411
2022-2023	376	2418
2023-2024	262	1917

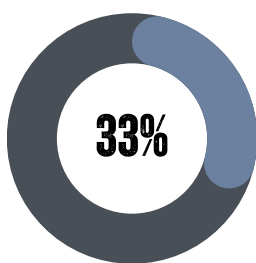
There are some drawbacks to assuming that this is due to a simple reduction in provision. We found evidence in our investigation that the post-COVID shift away from communal night shelters to self-contained accommodation had put pressure on how councils activate SWEP and it appears SWEP is now generally active less than it was during the pandemic year.

Councils appear to have had more flexibility to operate SWEP for longer periods up until around the end of 2022. This may be an explanation for reduced capacity due to pressure on budgets, or an indication that there is under-reporting since provision of different forms of accommodation might not be recorded effectively as it is now more dispersed.

FINDINGS: OVERALL

Some councils were able to offer a detailed description of the offer as part of their SWEP including policy activation protocols, partner lists, referral processes and how SWEP is monitored and reviewed. A good SWEP response might also have evidence of additional measures for Hot-SWEP and extreme weather. In some cases councils provided us with more than we needed.

At the other end of the spectrum some council responses did contain significant omissions, a lack of detail, limited evidence of comprehensive provision and/or evidence that the council has exclusionary verification processes. There were also councils who have clearly made no changes to their SWEP provision considering climate change. We assessed at least 30 councils who fell into this category which we are treating as significant within this study. We have included a tool to help councils improve their record keeping, in the recommendations section at the end.



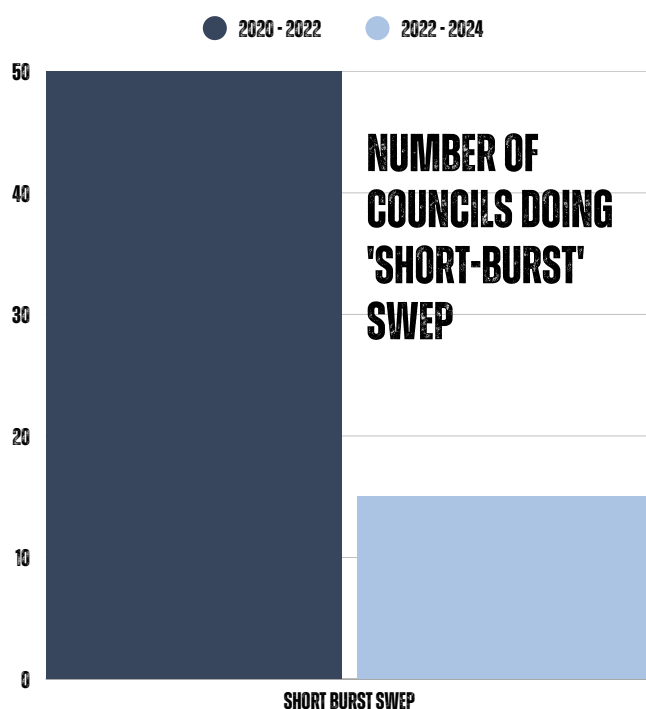
OF COUNCILS HAD NOT INTRODUCED NEW PROVISION OR CHANGES IN RESPONSE TO CLIMATE EMERGENCY

SHORT-BURST SWEP

Since our last investigation we have noted that evidence of 'short'-burst' SWEP offers has decreased.

Our last report called for 'short burst SWEP to be reduced.

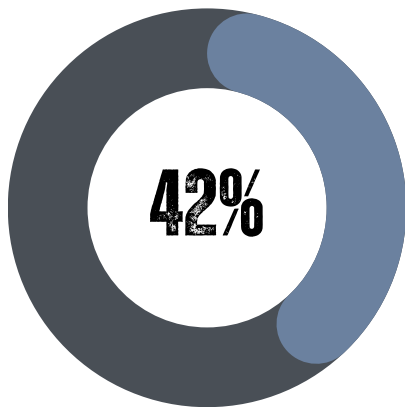
50 of 91 councils had done this between 2020 and 2022 and this figure has dropped substantially to 15 of 91 councils this time.



FINDINGS: QUALITY OF OFFER

VERIFICATION, CONDITIONALITY AND BAD PRACTICE

We found significant evidence that councils continued to perpetuate assertive and conditional systems of SWEP and we found evidence of bad practice.



42% of surveyed councils had some kind of verification system or could not prove that they have a humanitarian offer at times of extreme weather. It is disappointing to see so much evidence of gatekeeping in SWEP responses despite commitments from politicians such as London's Mayor Sir Sadiq Khan who announced an end to the requirement for Londoners to be verified as sleeping rough before accessing support. (9)

At this point in the report, it is important to remind ourselves that SWEP should be a swift, effective humanitarian, compassionate response to a life threatening emergency. We conducted extensive analysis of SWEP policy and protocol documents submitted by councils and found the following barriers restricting good SWEP practice:

THE 'OFFER' BEING CONDITIONAL AND ONE TIME ONLY

Acceptance of a nomination for SWEP accommodation will remain with the provider. Refusal of a reasonable offer by the individual will not result in a further offer. Should an individual be asked to leave a provision due to their own behaviours, they will not receive another offer in this SWEP period. They will however be eligible for a further offer should SWEP be activated again

Doncaster Council

A STARTING ASSUMPTION THAT PEOPLE MAY NOT BE 'GENUINE ROUGH SLEEPING'

SWEP still acts as something of a draw for people who may not be sleeping rough – usually looking for a hotel. Challenge is how to tell who is really rough sleeping and who isn't.

London Borough of Hounslow Policy document

FINDINGS: QUALITY OF OFFER

VERIFICATION, CONDITIONALITY AND BAD PRACTICE

BELIEF THAT PEOPLE CAN RETURN TO UNSAFE ACCOMMODATION

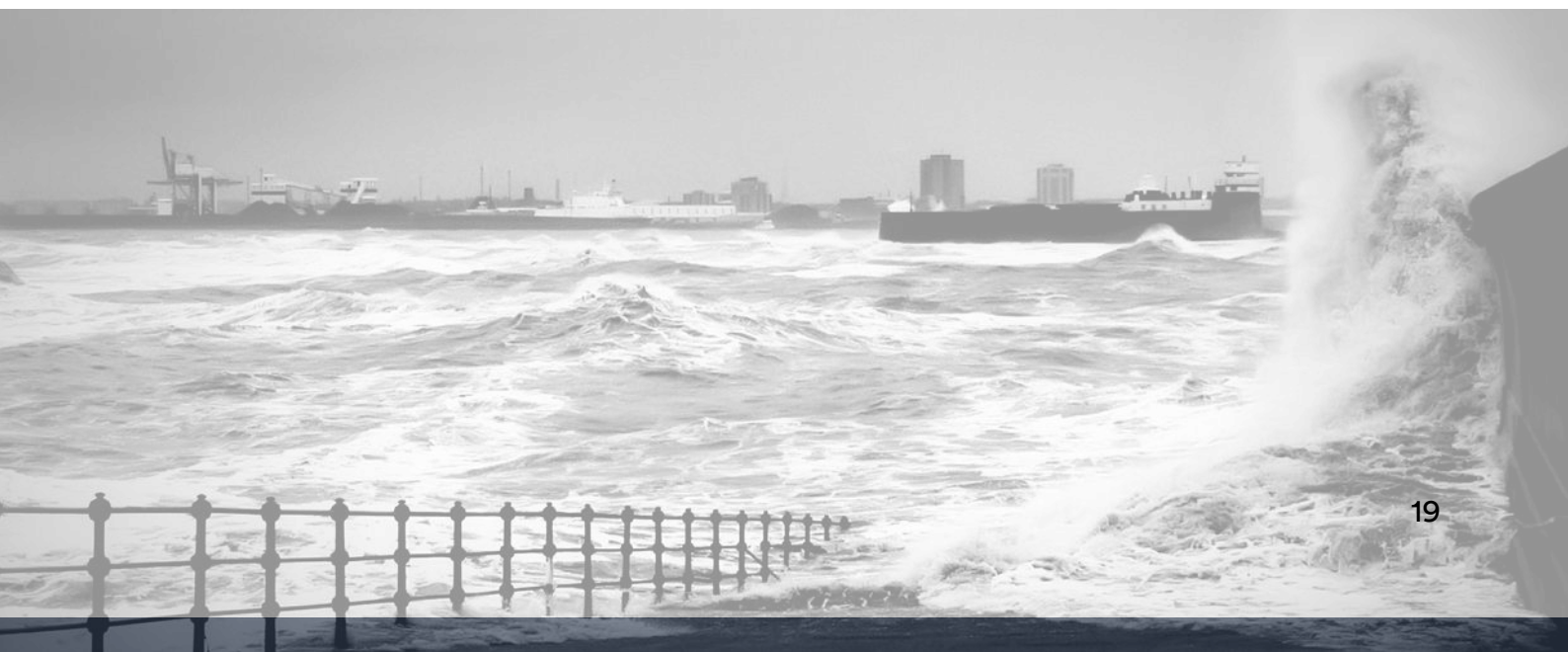
Closely linked to this we found evidence that councils would not offer SWEP placements if the person potentially had some other form of accommodation available to them. We feel the complex dynamics related to being homeless in a home or unsafe in accommodation are badly overlooked within these policy approaches.

VERIFICATION LIGHT

Brighton and Hove outlined the use of a verification-light approach, outlining extensive triaging and assessment processes before making offers.

Verification Light – to be used on non-verified rough sleepers. When a person tells a service that they will or may be rough sleeping tonight linked service staff will assess them with the Triage Screening Tool. This tool will be used to triage whether: -

- Their previous or recent accommodation is still available to them;*
- They have anywhere else they can stay (and if so, how they can be assisted there);*
- They may be in priority need;*
- They may be locally connected; and*
- They would be happy to go out of area if placed under SWEP.*



THE THREAT OF INVOLVING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

In our investigation, councils refer to the involvement of mental health services when an individual refuses a SWEP offer. We found that mental health screening and questioning processes were standardised in some Local Authorities and are used to assess mental capacity in relation to refusing offers. This was not strictly limited to London, and we found evidence of the practice elsewhere. However we found no evidence of councils questioning whether the offer was appropriate to a person's needs.

This sets a worrying precedent that councils and services are not questioning the offer, rather questioning the person's capacity.

Individuals who refuse shelter and support offered should be provided with information about the risks of cold weather on their health, especially if they are using substances. If someone continues to refuse help in these circumstances, it may be grounds to trigger a referral to mental health or safeguarding services

Cornwall County Council

Another approach can be found in the way the Simon Community understands people who are long term street homeless:

Contrary to popular belief, the majority of people that we see who are out for multiple years or sometimes decades are not chaotic (of course some are but also they are experiencing huge amounts of unrelenting compound trauma as a result of systemic failure). A lot of the people that we see for years are survivalist experts whose capacity for enduring hard conditions over prolonged / indefinite periods would make the average SAS soldier look a little bit soft. They don't tolerate being infantilised / disrespected / manipulated. They vote with their feet.

We accept that it is important to care for and sensitively explore the mental health of anyone subjected to extreme weather, but we urge councils and mainstream services to evaluate their processes to ensure they are trauma conscious. We urge services to consider improving the offer, rather than deeming people to lack mental capacity if they refuse the offer.

FINDINGS: QUALITY OF OFFER

VERIFICATION, CONDITIONALITY AND BAD PRACTICE

SIT UP SERVICES



At least 11 councils operate 'sit-up services.' We found evidence of this by scrutinising policy and protocol documents. The local authority areas on this map are Cambridge, Cornwall, Hackney, Wolverhampton, Liverpool, Doncaster, Sunderland, Manchester, Nottingham, Newcastle and Reading. However, we have reason to believe it could be many more.

In Hackney, the sit up service is not mentioned in the documents. We only know about it because one of our shelter guests was put in a sit up service in Hackney council offices for a few nights in January 2025, before coming to our shelter and showed us footage of the provision. Hackney has good provision including Hackney night shelter so it is hard to understand why the authority would ask people to sleep on plastic chairs in the lobby of the council offices, with bright lights on all night.

Sit-up services are not an appropriate offer for SWEP or at any time.

FINDINGS: QUALITY OF OFFER

VERIFICATION, CONDITIONALITY AND BAD PRACTICE

At least 10 London councils stipulate that anyone in London who is offered a SWEP placement must be on registered on CHAIN. A further 3 councils could not evidence that they didn't do this meaning nearly half of all London councils are insisting on data monitoring process as a pre-requisite for offering support. These findings highlight that the use of SWEP as a humanitarian measure is often undermined in practice.

In our assessment of London councils we found the following forms of conditionality being worked into assessments:

- A need for a 'bedded down contact' recorded in their data history.
- Having a profile on CHAIN to evidence that the person has a history of rough sleeping.
- A need to sign various agreements and declarations before being offered support.
- Refusals being met with potential for referral to mental health services.



FINDINGS: QUALITY OF OFFER

VERIFICATION, CONDITIONALITY AND BAD PRACTICE

LB of Brent 2022-23	Yes	LB of Islington 2022-23	Yes
LB of Bromley 2022-23	Unknown	LB of Lewisham 2022-23	Yes
LB of Croydon 2022-23	Unknown	LB of Merton 2022-23	Yes
LB Ealing 2022-23	Yes	LB of Newham 2022-23	Yes
LB of Hammersmith & Fulham 2022-23	Unknown	LB of Tower Hamlets 2022-23	Yes
LB of Haringey 2022-23	Yes	FULL LIST OF LONDON COUNCILS THAT REQUIRE VERIFICATION OR WHO DID NOT KNOW IF THEY REQUIRE VERIFICATION	
LB of Harrow 2022-23	Yes		
LB of Hounslow 2022-23	Yes		



FINDINGS: QUALITY OF OFFER

WHAT IS WRONG WITH SWEP? A DISCUSSION WITH RESIDENTS & GUESTS AT THE SIMON COMMUNITY

The Simon Community has been running community houses and street work in London since 1963. They have been a partner of Museum of Homelessness since our founding in 2014.

The Simon Community held a session with guests and residents, to feed directly into the findings for the second edition of *Severe Weather Emergency* and we share their thoughts here unedited.

THE OUTREACH COMES TOO LATE AT NIGHT

If people are already bedded down it isn't helpful to be woken up in the early hours of the morning to be taken somewhere else for just a few hours. It makes them more tired for the following day and subsequently even less resilient to the cold conditions.

TEMPERATURE ALONE IS NOT A GOOD ENOUGH ASSESSMENT

On Tuesday 6th January 2026 the SWEP deactivation notice came through 15 minutes after the snow started falling outside our window. It was forecast to rain all night. The forecast said that it would 'feel like -3'. The 'feel like' is more important than the number on the thermometer when you're in a doorway. There is more to take into consideration than a single number.

CONNECTING WITH SWEP IS RISKY

The outreach will only find people who are prepared to make themselves very visible. Plenty of people have very well-hidden sleep spots – this is for safety. In order to benefit from SWEP you have to weigh up the benefits of being visible vs being too cold. Both are dangerous. The current system requires people who are already very cold to sit passively in very cold places in the hope that someone will come and offer them a SWEP bed. It often doesn't happen. Wouldn't it be better to have locations for people to make their way to when it gets that cold. It's not hard to get word around about these things. If the SWEP was on and there was a place to go to we would be able to share that information at a hand out.

FINDINGS: QUALITY OF OFFER

WHAT IS WRONG WITH SWEP? A DISCUSSION WITH RESIDENTS & GUESTS AT THE SIMON COMMUNITY

UNSUITABLE ACCOMMODATION

At the start of January some guests were taken from WC1 to somewhere near Heathrow. By the time they got there it was 4am. They were asked to leave at 8am, given a travel card and had to make it back to their sleep site in the rush hour. They felt that the people who 'helped' them were just using them for numbers. They said they won't go next time.

A young woman that we saw on New Year's Day had been taken to an HMO. It flooded and all her stuff got soaked. She said she won't go next time.

SOMETHING ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER THAN NOTHING

If we are people who live inside we are inclined to believe that something is better than nothing during periods of severe weather. But if we are people who live outside and our first experience with severe weather provision is problematic / inconvenient / disturbing or disrupting then we have learned that nothing can be better than something and in future we will take measures to mitigate the risk of disappointment and disruption through just staying out in the cold.



Image: Simon Community, 2023

FINDINGS: QUALITY OF OFFER

Museum of Homelessness operates its own SWEP response, including an emergency winter night shelter. Since the publication of the last report, we have trialled our own emergency shelter which has been highlighted by Housing Justice and Homeless Link as national best practice. (10)

Through our work 'on the ground' running our shelter and day services, we identified 8 key reasons why individuals don't feel safe and/or won't access SWEP accommodation. This has been affirmed by evidence gathered by colleagues in other organisations, such as the Simon Community section above.

TOP 8 REASONS A SWEP OFFER WOULD BE REFUSED

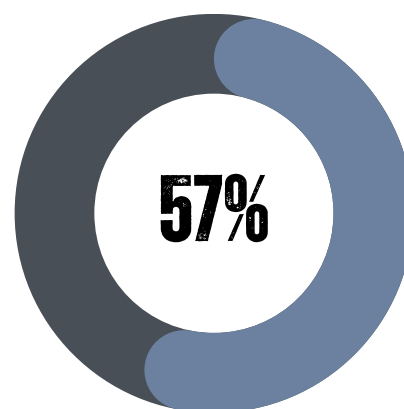
- Bad quality provision unlikely to provide respite - easier to sleep outside
- Too far and no thought given to how people will get back
- Not worth it for one night
- Too disruptive to routine - including being expected to move in middle of night just for a few hours
- Feeling safer on the streets
- Concern about losing belongings or sleep sites
- Conditionality of offer or overbearing assessments
- Lack of trust in services

We have used these findings to create a checklist tool, included at the end of this report for professionals to assess the SWEP offer.

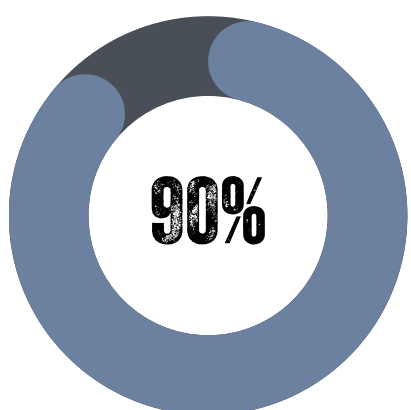
FINDINGS: EXTREME HEAT, WIND AND RAIN

Since the publication of our first report *Severe Weather Emergency 2020-2022*, Local Authorities have become far more responsive to extreme weather as posing a real risk to life. However, there is evidence that at the time covered, this is currently more at policy than practice stage.

Nearly two thirds of all councils surveyed for the current data set had created new measures in relation to extreme weather and this often included rain and wind as well as heat. A further 9 had policies in draft. There were some good examples of authorities correlating their own process with the UKHSA weather alert system. It is reasonable to assume that many councils are taking their responsibilities in relation to climate related extreme weather provision more seriously and a lot of work is happening at a local level.

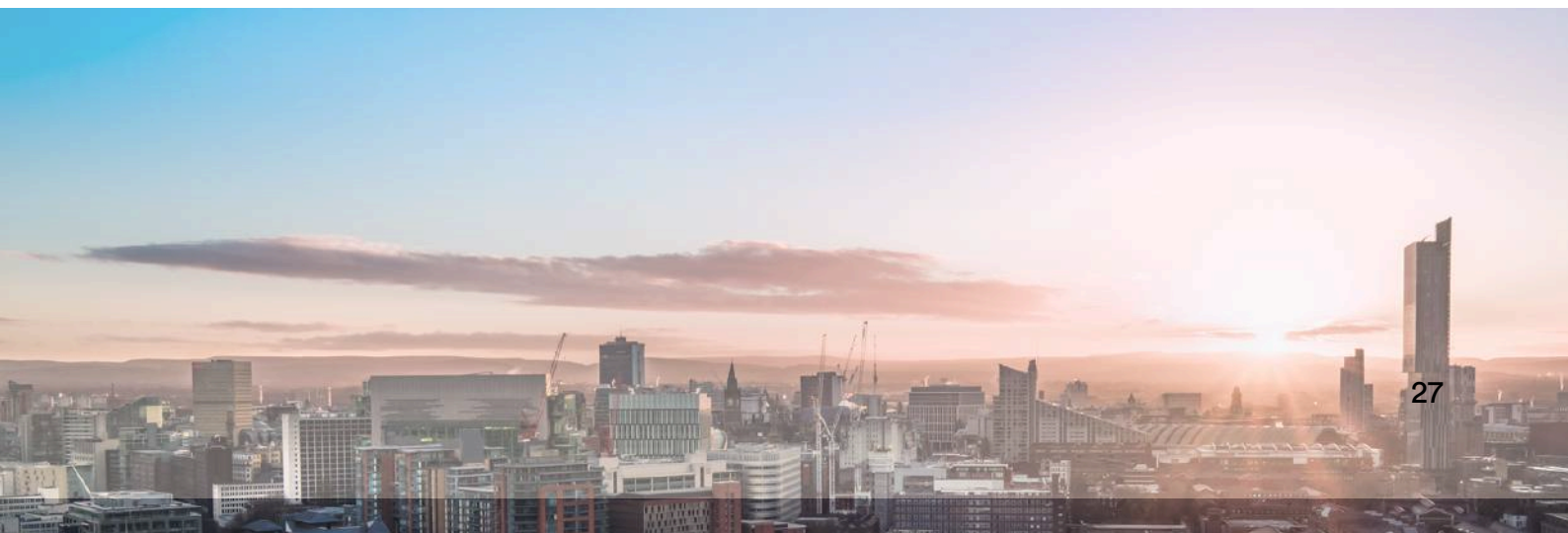


**COUNCILS ARE
IMPLEMENTING NEW
MEASURES**



**OF ACTIVATIONS WERE FOR COLD
WEATHER**

Despite policies being created for other forms of weather, around 90% of all activations in both years covered are for cold temperatures. This suggests that councils have some way to go before they can be said to be applying SWEP responses consistently across all forms of extreme weather. This is also borne out by recording data where the majority of individuals assisted were recorded as being assisted during winter months. Only 6% of individuals recorded as being assisted by councils were recorded during summer months.



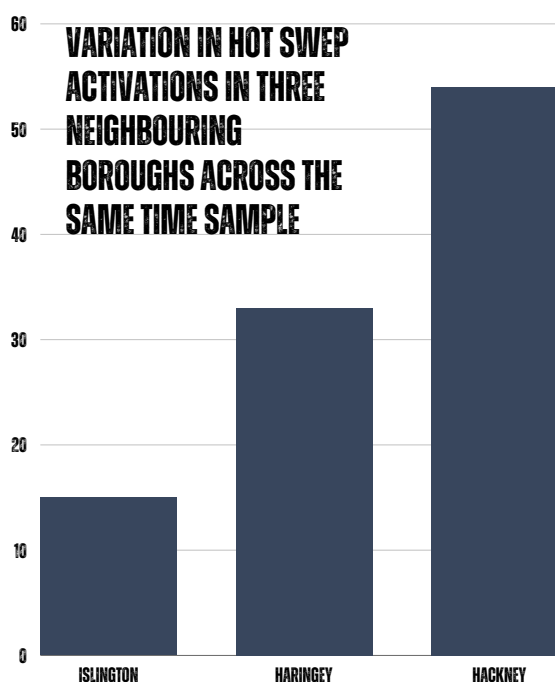
FINDINGS: EXTREME HEAT, WIND AND RAIN

SWEP activations do not always correlate between geographical areas. The selection of three geographically adjacent London Councils allows some insight into the correlations & differences between their submissions to us.

Put simply, we had assumed that the both the number of SWEP activations and their periods would highly correlate (if not match exactly). However, we observe significant variation in this respect. This variation is most pronounced in relation to H-SWEP

CASE STUDY: VARIATION IN HOT SWEP RESPONSES IN NORTH LONDON

Hackney, Haringey & Islington all supplied H-SWEP data, however the differences here are much greater than with C-SWEP. Hackney reported the most activations and days of support and Islington reported the least for both years considered. Based on their reports Hackney provided 54 days of H-SWEP support in the period, Haringey 33 days, and Islington 15 days.

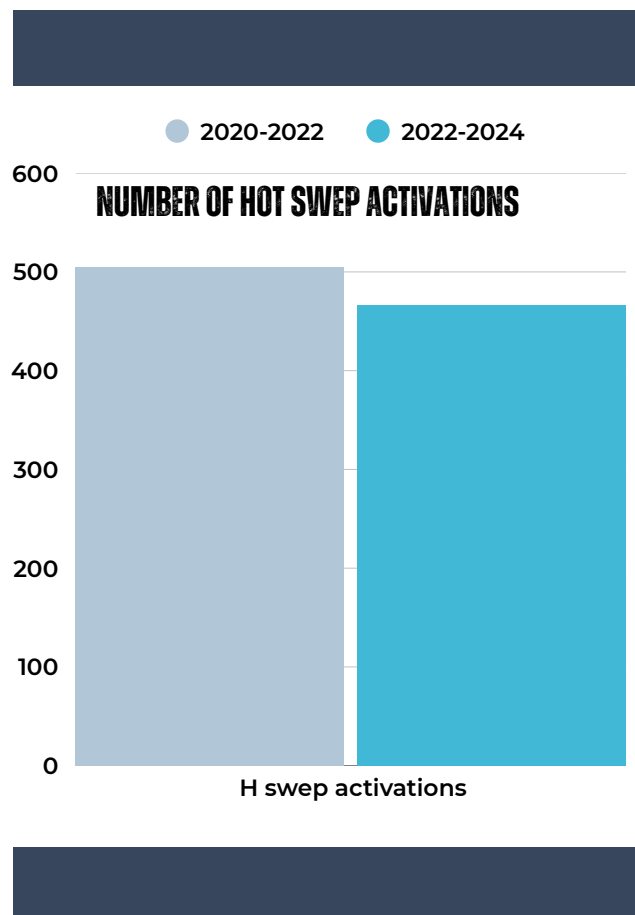


Again, if expecting the same or at least similar results between these Councils is reasonable then the even greater differences reported may indicate the immaturity of H-SWEP offerings by these Councils. This reinforces other findings regarding the challenge of achieving a consistent offer and protocol for H-SWEP.

FINDINGS: EXTREME HEAT, WIND AND RAIN

Heat SWEP activations overall were slightly lower than in the previous study. We have identified some mitigating factors for this. 2024 was the coolest summer since 2015 and in addition formal heat SWEP guidance was only issued in Summer 2023, which was mid way through the period investigated.

The research of Carbon Brief into Heat SWEP activations in 2024 and 2025 to evidence council responsiveness. In their work to assess council responses to heat emergencies, their work revealed a surge in SWEP usage in 2025, as the UK faced its hottest ever summer. Just halfway through summer in mid-July, councils had already collectively triggered SWEPS at least 149 times – up from 93 in the entirety of summer in 2024. (11)



ENCOURAGING SIGNS: LOCAL NEED

We found evidence that Local Authorities have considered their local needs and also geography and topography:

“High winds can lead to an increased risk of injury through uprooted trees, falling walls, dislodged pieces of roofing and other debris. In Cornwall we particularly need to consider the location of local rough sleeping sites and the potential for harm from gale-force winds where people are, for example, sleeping in tents.” Cornwall County Council



FINDINGS: EXTREME HEAT, WIND AND RAIN

CASE STUDY: A CHANGING APPROACH TO CLIMATE READINESS IN CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge City Council offered an insight into how SWEP has been viewed in the past and some of the changes being thought about today.

Historically, the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) has consisted of support during cold weather only, with several communal spaces for people to sleep for the night, with the expectation that they will vacate the building the following morning.

Following the introduction of Crossways, the winter provision project between It Takes a City, Cambridge City Council and the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, we now have a dedicated accommodation provision during the winter months.

As the climate continues to change, severe hot weather events are becoming more frequent and intense. It's crucial for Cambridge City Council and our partners to have comprehensive plans in place to protect rough sleepers during the summer, when temperatures become very hot. This document provides a detailed overview of the key steps involved in preparing for and responding to hot weather emergencies.

Despite this progress, Cambridge do still prioritise sit up services and demonstrated conditionality around offers.

FINDINGS: EXTREME HEAT, WIND AND RAIN

We also saw evidence that Local Authorities were defining specific risks in relation to different types of extreme weather.

Many people sleeping rough will already have health issues caused or made worse by homelessness. Extreme cold weather can worsen serious health problems and potentially lead to death for those who are exposed overnight or for long periods of time. High winds can cause a higher likelihood of injury due to uprooted trees, falling walls, displaced roofing among other items. Prolonged periods of rain, or sudden heavy rain can trigger floods and landslides. Individuals who are sleeping near to rivers, streams, canals or under bridges could be at higher risk due to an increased risk of drowning. Those people sleeping rough who are unable to change out of wet clothes or shoes are at greater risk of developing health issues such as trench-foot.

Derby City Council

Finally, we saw evidence that Local Authorities were following standardised processes around heat alerts and heat protocols as issued by the Government including the use of the 4 categories of extreme weather (green, yellow, amber and red)

We believe that the above offer ample evidence of what can be done locally.

We would like to see more evidence of SWEP activations in relation to rain and wind in the future and climate change mitigation processes and projects to support people affected in this particular way.

We also believe that a full review of energy performance and building quality in relation to climate readiness and SWEP provision should take place. Such a project might review energy performance ratings and registered hostels to understand better the quality of SWEP accommodation across the board. This work might help make the case for better support from government to improve building standards and could lead to the improvement of SWEP accommodation across the board.

FINDINGS: COMMUNICATIONS

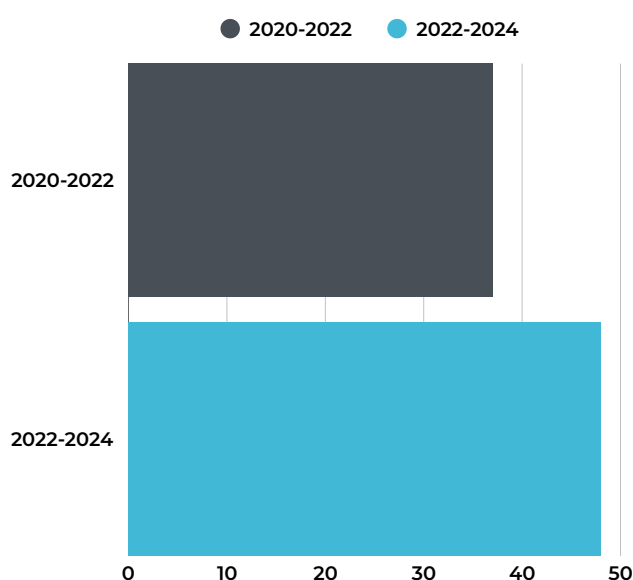
HOW COUNCILS COMMUNICATE ABOUT SWEP

This section examines how councils communicate externally about SWEP. We undertook a systematic review of council websites for this.

We noted a number of areas where councils could be more robust, consistent and clear with their SWEP messaging.

We identified an increase in the number of councils not mentioning SWEP on their websites. In *Severe Weather Emergency* 2020-2022 investigation we found that more than a third (37%) of all councils don't mention SWEP and this figure has risen to 48% in this latest investigation. This is of concern as SWEP should be a communications priority.

COUNCIL WEBSITES WITH NO MENTION OF SWEP AT ALL



WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

In September 2025 a man who was sleeping in Blackpool's Revoe Park was killed by a tree branch due to high winds.

This was a devastating situation and highlights the need for more effective planning and responses to extreme weather. Unfortunately, social media traffic in reaction to the incident was high-jacked by an outpouring of vitriol from social media users who simply used the occasion to berate asylum seekers. (12)

The incident underscores the need for effective communication on council websites and other forums. We need more accountability and challenge from councils, as well as information about what is provided during SWEP so that the public are informed. Homelessness is increasingly becoming a flashpoint for information disorder so we urge all authorities to provide clear information

RECOMMENDATIONS

- SWEP needs to be made a statutory duty and until this is the case, consistent and agreed practice should be implemented at local government level.
- Short term SWEP, where offers are made for just one night should be discontinued.
- The In for Good principle should be applied across the board.
- SWEP must be unconditional and properly trauma conscious with a non-institutional approach that emphasises relationship, compassion and building trust and safety.
- Verification systems should not be used to determine whether people get a SWEP offer.
- SWEP offers should be designed with the involvement of people who are homeless.
- SWEP should be included in all climate mitigation plans by central and local government.
- SWEP must be formally expanded to include heatwaves and extreme rainfall, with actual implementation.
- Grassroots and non-commissioned groups should be included in SWEP communications, delivery and roll out.
- Streetlink should be discontinued.
- Our 5 point comms plan should be implemented and councils should take a proactive approach to information disorder around SWEP provision, stressing the humanitarian aspects of SWEP.

RECOMMENDATIONS: TOOLS

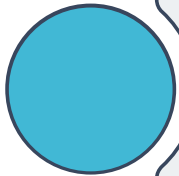
HOW TO IMPROVE COMMS

5 communications essentials for effective SWEP responses.

We recommend that local authorities give clear information about SWEP on their websites and end reliance on Streetlink. We have published findings on the problems with Streetlink on our website.
(13)



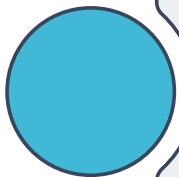
**WHERE AND WHEN PEOPLE CAN PROACTIVELY ACCESS
HELP AND WHO IS IT FOR**



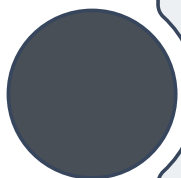
WHAT THE OUT OF HOURS OPTION IS



**WHICH COUNCIL TEAM OR
COMMISSIONED ORG IS RESPONSIBLE**



**WHEN SWEP WILL BE ACTIVATED AND DE-
ACTIVATED**



**WHAT THE SWEP OFFER IS FOR HEAT,
COLD, RAIN OR STORMS**

We include here some guidance for local authorities to improve the records they keep around SWEP and their responses to our enquiry in future iterations.

A model response - which would indicate a good quality of SWEP offer:

- Would explain the responsibility / process for SWEP activations and deactivations
- Would confirm a formal SWEP Policy differentiating between different types of Severe Weather events
- Would summarise the SWEP offer differentiating between different types of Severe Weather events
- Would explain how the SWEP offer has or will evolve differentiating between different types of Severe Weather events
- Would confirm no interruption to business as usual by SWEP
- Would confirm clearly that people are prioritised over systems and not use verification systems
- Would record and detail the numbers, service type & dates for SWEP activations by type in a consistent way

RECOMMENDATIONS: TOOLS

HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR ASK

We encourage councils and services to refer to this as a kind of gate-keeping checklist to ensure their offers match up with what people need. Furthermore, we encourage all colleagues working in homelessness to reframe the idea of an 'offer' to an 'ask.' It can be a big ask to come inside. How do you know that your ask is meeting people's needs?

Quality of the offer	Are people going to be put in a sit up service? Will people be able to sleep? Would you want to sleep there?	
Location of the offer	Is it miles from their networks? How will the person get back in the morning?	
Length of time offered	If it's a Friday night will it be extended for the weekend? What are the procedures around deactivation? How will people be informed and when?	
Disruption to routine	Will it be worth it for the person? What will they have to lose out on in order to come inside? How can you reassure any fears they have?	
Safety	Will it feel safer than the streets? Think about the space, welcome, lighting, food, number of guests, team and other elements.	
Belongings	What are the plans for the person's belongings?	
Conditionality	How truly accessible is the offer? SWEP should be as no questions asked as possible, overbearing gatekeeping and assessments do not feel safe for some people.	
Trust	Does this person have a history of being let down by this service or authority? How can this be healed or mitigated for SWEP (and beyond)? Could local community groups build a better relationship?	

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