

Motion to: Council

24 September 2024

Subject: Preventing the deaths during extreme weather of people experiencing homelessness

Proposer: Councillor Hoechner

Seconder: Councillor Catt

In December 2023, it was reported in The Guardian that refugees experiencing homelessness were being refused accommodation and left in the freezing cold in Norwich, calling into question our status as a City of Sanctuary. The article talked about a concerning 'new tone of indifference towards young homeless people' that needs to be addressed urgently to prevent such cruelty from reoccurring and to save lives this winter. Our Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) is not currently in line with the most recent Homeless Link guidance and this motion seeks to address that. A staggering 1,313 people experiencing homelessness died on the streets of the United Kingdom in 2022 when statistics were last compiled by the 'Dying Homeless Project', representing a steady increase in deaths since 2020. The present motion seeks to ensure that Norwich does not in future become part of this terrifying statistic

This council **RESOLVES** to:

- 1) Ensure that Norwich City Council's SWEP is brought in line with the Homeless Link SWEP toolkit published in 2023 in preparation for Winter this year, and that it addresses the concerns raised in the media and by advocacy groups last winter, including by:
 - a. Ensuring adequate and appropriate provision to meet the needs of a diverse group of users on every day and night of the week, including by ensuring that sufficient extra capacity is available in case a decision is made not to operate the Winter Night Shelter this winter and by ensuring that shelter can be accessed throughout the night;
 - b. working towards single-room accommodation for everyone in need of shelter
 - c. Ensuring provision is available to everyone, including those outside of usual eligibility and entitlement frameworks, such as those restricted due to immigration status, and including those who have recently become homeless, and not only those considered to be entrenched homeless
 - d. Ensuring that verification of rough sleeping is not used as a barrier to offering SWEP provision

- e. Moving away from the narrow standard three-night criteria for triggering SWEP, whereby SWEP is activated only when three consecutive nights of freezing temperatures are predicted; and instead
 - f. Taking a common-sense approach where SWEP is activated whenever there is likely to be an acute need, even if this is for less than 3 consecutive days, taking into account weather warnings, near-freezing temperatures, rain, snow, wind chill, gales and heat, with a focus on feels-like temperatures, as well as consulting Cold-Health Alerts
 - g. Taking an approach that prioritises risk minimisation where different weather forecasts make different predictions
 - h. Setting out clear timescales for any SWEP activation and establishing actions for agencies to take, such as notifying relevant clients
 - i. Offering homelessness provisions during extreme hot weather, recognising that death rates among homeless people are higher during hot weather than cold weather; including by publishing a list of designated day-time shelters available during periods of extreme heat that provide water, sun hats, sun screen, and other necessities
- 2) Explore the possibility of installing water fountains in central locations such as Norwich Market and Prince of Wales Road to ensure everyone has easy access to water during periods of extreme heat
 - 3) Make detailed information on Norwich City Council's policy on Severe Weather Arrangements available on its website
 - 4) To ensure that information on whether SWEP is/will be activated is easily accessible and swiftly available, through a multitude of channels which could include emails to partner organisations, local media, Council social media, digital displays and a toggle or similar feature on Norwich City Council website so that relevant partner organisations and service users can easily access this information as soon as it becomes available
 - 5) Set out what the capacity is at the Winter Night Shelter, and to record uptake, any excess demand, and the reasons given to clients and/or partners for any potential rejections going forward
 - 6) Develop procedures for liaising with the police whenever SWEP is activated so that the latter directs homeless people towards the relevant provision and shelter
 - 7) Write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to express concern about the lack of sufficient long-term government funding for local authority homelessness services and social housing.
 - 8) Write to the Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to express concern about the insufficient provision of care assessments and services for people sleeping rough

- 9) Liaise with Norfolk County Council to ensure care assessments are easily and swiftly accessible for people sleeping rough to facilitate their access to specialist regulated care provision
- 10) Document any cases of death of people presenting as homeless in Norwich, including those in exempt accommodation, recording as a minimum information on the setting, date, cause of death, accommodation type, age, gender, ethnicity and immigration status