**SWEP and winter provision – What does 21/22 look like ? – practice exchange pre-read 29/11/2021**

**SWEP and winter provision – What does 21/22 look like?**

This time last year, when we were thinking about winter provision and looking to the government for guidance, the message was very clear: Hostel and communal provision should only be used if there was no other choice, local authorities should seek to house everyone in a different way to mitigate the risks of Covid 19.

Although life has started to return to normal this year, the risks to the vulnerable are still very real. How can we plan and provide suitable accommodation this winter? What services do our customers and communities expect us to provide? With increasing infections and higher admissions to hospital during the cold months inevitable, and the need to keep people safe at the forefront of our minds, how do we best provide support?

**Night Shelters**

In London, Housing Justice has confirmed that around 2/3 of night shelters are saying they won't open over Winter, and the rest are considering if it's possible, given the directive that any hostel should ensure that they have plans in place to support those who develop symptoms or who test positive for COVID-19. This includes tracing the contacts and considering what self-contained accommodation is available to self-isolate in or ensuring they could ‘cohort’ guests based on their COVID-19 status.

Is this impacting night shelter accommodation in your local areas? This could cause a real issue in terms of winter provision, especially if the use of hotels is limited. We are yet to gain clarity on what MHCLG are planning to do/where funding will come from if we do need to look at alternative provision.

**Funding**

Following the recent funding announcement [Support for rough sleepers](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-support-for-rough-sleepers-over-winter) what can we learn from each other and the wider sector? What are our plans if the country returns to lockdown conditions? How does this uncertainty affect our current plans/provision?

As the government has pledged to end rough sleeping by the end of this Parliament, further funding of £66 million has been made available to Council’s over the winter months. Extra help is also available in the form of funding for counselling, rehab and detox services to support rough sleepers with drug and alcohol issues. What can we plan to do to help those who benefit from this funding sustain and maintain positive changes in their lives. What services can we bring in to provide support to maximise any gains which have been made?

**What might any rise in evictions impact winter planning?**

The pandemic saw the demographic of people coming through homelessness services change, with the emphasis on rough sleepers and single homeless. The eviction ban and furlough schemes have held back and protected families and others from falling into homelessness but what does the future look like now these safety nets have been removed?

The government’s support to this group is a £310 million Homelessness Prevention Grant, with councils providing financial support or helping households find new homes

Joseph Rowntree Foundation analysis is clear that the £65m addition to the Homelessness Prevention Grant rent payment support package for private renters facing eviction ‘during the winter months’ falls far short of the approximately £440 million of arrears that households are currently struggling with.

With the government’s budget announcement of a decrease in the UC taper – the rate at which UC is withdrawn from working claimants – from 63% to 55% being a boost for those in work, non-workers will still be £1,000 pa worse off compared to this time last year, following the withdrawal of the £20 a week UC uplift. What plans can we share that might help non-working customers through the winter months?

**What next?**

**Good practice in this area**

* Ensure covid-19 safe accommodation is available should it be needed for all rough sleepers
* Regular checks on number of cases and potential cases from all sources;
* Strong emphasis on prevention work through all work streams.
* Working closely with drug & alcohol and mental health services to provide wrap around service
* Forge strong partnerships with the faith and community sector organisations who focus on front line delivery

**Something to think about before the exchange**

* The figures discussed are huge, but when this is shared out across all local authorities and diluted by all the different necessary services, the question of: Does the funding go far enough? must be asked.
* If we lack suitable properties to provide homes to people now, how can we prevent the number of people in temporary accommodation continuing to rise?
* Have we developed housing led approaches to tackle blockages in temporary accommodation that we can extend or develop to help over the winter period?
* What plans to we have for a more housing-led approach to new influxes into the system?