

Pan-London SWEP activation procedure 2023-24

This document details the process which will be followed for activation of SWEP in London during winter 2023-24. It should be read alongside the GLA's 'London SWEP Guidance 2023-24' document.

This procedure has been developed alongside services and local authorities and should be incorporated into local SWEP plans.

Note that 'activation' refers to opening of SWEP accommodation to new referrals, not whether shelter remains available to those already booked in (see the "In for Good" principle). 'Deactivation' relates to closing of SWEP to new referrals only, and is not a directive for those already booked in to be asked to leave.

SWEP activation procedure

Preparation

1. GLA will provide all local authorities with this procedure document and separate SWEP guidance.
2. GLA will request SWEP details of all local authorities, including planned provision, and key contact details.

Monitoring

3. GLA officers will monitor daily temperatures using a bespoke 3-day forecast which the GLA receives from the Met Office¹.
4. If the forecast is for temperatures of 0°C or below within the next three days in any part of London, the GLA will send an advanced warning email to London boroughs.
5. If the daily Met Office report (received at 07:30 every morning) forecasts a minimum temperature of 0°C or lower anywhere in London within the next 24 hours, GLA officers will activate SWEP for all of London by 10:00 (go to step 8 for activation).²

¹ The temperatures forecast in these bespoke reports commonly differ slightly from the temperatures forecast for the same boroughs on the Met Office's website or app. The bespoke reports provide a more accurate forecast for each specific area and are therefore used to inform activation and deactivation.

² In instances where temperatures are close to 0°C and other factors are in play, such as heavy snowfall or very cold 'feels-like temperatures', GLA may also activate SWEP. In any unconventional situations GLA may consult with those borough leads who can be contacted before making a decision on activation or deactivation. In the unlikely event that temperatures reach 0°C in one isolated location and are not expected to be near 0°C in any other part of the capital, the GLA may take the decision not to activate SWEP at a pan-London level.

6. If the daily Met Office report (received at 07:30 every morning) forecasts a minimum temperature of 2°C or lower but above 0°C, this will prompt a specific additional round of manual checks by the team at 11:59³.
7. If the forecast temperature has fallen to or below 0°C by 11:59, GLA officers will consider whether the forecast of 0°C is localised or widespread.

If localised, GLA will

- contact those specific boroughs affected to notify them that they should activate SWEP locally
- confirm that overflow SWEP will be available to them if local SWEP capacity is full.

If widespread, GLA will

- trigger a pan-London activation of SWEP.

Activation

8. GLA officers will email the SWEP contacts network with an alert that SWEP has been activated. This will be done by midday at the latest.⁴
9. The lead contact from each borough, or a nominated deputy, will confirm receipt of the alert and activation of local SWEP plans by return email to the GLA.
10. Lead contacts in each borough will be responsible for cascading activation notification to local services and partners.
11. If the temperature has fallen to 0°C on a Friday, or it is forecast on a Friday that temperatures will drop to that level during a weekend or bank holiday, SWEP will normally be activated until the morning of the next working day, regardless of any changes in temperature.
12. Only in a very exceptional scenario, such as unusually large variations in temperature over the weekend, will the GLA activate or deactivate SWEP during a weekend or bank holiday. GLA officers will make every effort to consult with boroughs before this is actioned.
13. In extreme circumstances, SWEP may be activated during the winter due to periods of severe weather unrelated to freezing temperatures e.g., dangerously high winds or storms. This is most likely to be prompted by a red weather warning issued by the Met Office, indicating risk to life. Wherever possible, GLA officers will seek to contact a number of borough leads to consult them on this potential decision prior to activation.

³ In the event that these conditions are met on a Friday the following procedure will apply throughout the weekend.

⁴ If no alert is received by midday it should be assumed that SWEP is not being activated, however in conditions that are considered marginal a message to confirm that SWEP is not being activated may be sent.

On-going activation

14. This process will repeat, with daily alert messages confirming that SWEP remains active as long as minimum forecast temperatures remain at or below 0°C in any part of London. Daily confirmations from borough leads are not required.

Deactivation

15. If the forecast is for minimum temperatures above 0°C in all parts of London, the GLA will take the decision to deactivate SWEP across all of London
16. GLA officers will email the SWEP contacts network with an alert that SWEP has been deactivated, and a reminder of the “In for Good” principle. This will be done by midday.

If a council opens local SWEP earlier, or for longer, than pan-London activation this is of course welcome, local leads are simply requested to notify the GLA.

The principles of SWEP activation are reliant on accurate forecasting of temperatures. In the event that measured temperatures are significantly higher or lower than those that were forecast there is, unfortunately, little that can be done as this will only become apparent retrospectively. If it is found that this occurs frequently or the impacts of this phenomenon are severe, this will be taken into account when reviewing the current SWEP process and alternative triggers may be considered.