



Report on Severe Weather Emergency Provision 2012



Background

In January 2012 B&NES and local providers of services to homeless people drafted and agreed a Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, (SWEP). The creation of an agreed local protocol recognised the changed shape and stretch capacity of local service provision and the risk that previous informal arrangements for rough sleepers during severe weather periods might put unnecessary strain on these services, or worse still prove to be inadequate in meeting the need.

The SWEP was based on best practice arrangements in other parts of the country and was guided by the fundamental principal of providing a service to prevent winter deaths of homeless people.

Severe Weather Provision January-February 2012

On Monday 30th January temperatures dropped below 0^oC in and around B&NES, with a prediction that the temperature would remain below zero for a minimum of at least three consecutive nights. Julian House staff, took the decision to initiate SWEP, and informed relevant agencies, including B&NES Council, Reach (Stonham, DHI and Shape), the police, emergency services, Genesis Lifeline and YMCA.

B&NES agreed to put out the following email to all relevant agencies and individuals:

Cold Weather Provisions for Rough Sleepers

Sleeping out is always dangerous and risky, but during cold weather, people sleeping rough are particularly vulnerable. The Council has worked with members of the Homelessness Partnership to develop and put in place measures to ensure that these risks are minimised for as is possible. From today, and until the end of this week, Julian House Night Shelter on Manvers Street has extended its opening hours and will be open 24 hours a day, providing shelter and food to anyone who would otherwise be sleeping rough. They have suspended their banning policy on all but a very small number of people deemed too great a risk to staff, which means that most of those previously unable to use the night shelter can now do so. The street outreach service provided by the Reach partnership has also extended its operations and will be going out until 11pm every week-day night seeking out rough sleepers and encouraging them to use Julian House. The extended provision of services is being reviewed on a daily basis, in light of the latest weather forecasts. Given strong indications of warmer weather, service provision will return to normal, so please bear this in mind.

If you have reason to speak to people sleeping rough in your day to day work, please bear in mind that these temporary arrangements are in place and encourage anyone you come across to use Julian House.

Additional Service Provision:

Julian House extended their hours, staying open throughout the day (as a drop in), including both Saturday and Sunday. Creating, alongside the Night Shelter, a service which was open for 24 hours a day with the exception of a two hour period in mid-afternoon, which was used to allow cleaning of the building to take place. During the afternoon closure individual client appointments continued to ensure key working and assessments were not missed.

Additional bedding was brought out of storage and extra food purchased to meet increased need. Office space was cleared in preparation for emergency extra beds if required.

Genesis Lifeline Centre agreed to open for an additional hour a day, extending their service from 2.00pm – 5.00pm during weekdays. This covered the cleaning period at Julian house and ensured that rough sleepers could access a service for the whole 24 hours and would not be forced to stay in the open.

Julian House and YMCA initiated arrangements which had already been included in a long standing service level agreement, whereby a 4 bed dormitory was allocated for rough sleepers. Four suitable and low risk clients were offered the chance to sleep at the YMCA while still being entitled to access Julian House for food, other crisis services and their on-going support. This worked extremely well and meant that over this period Julian House did not have to open a costly Over Flow facility in Manvers Street Baptist Church.

The YMCA also offered the chance of an additional dormitory being made available if numbers dictated a need to do so. The flexibility of the YMCA and their willingness to work closely with Julian House enhanced services being made available to rough sleepers during this period.

Staffing

Julian House staff agreed to changes on their normal working practice and the rota was adjusted to ensure suitable and safe staffing cover was provided throughout the SWEP period. This included both day and night staff coming in early to ensure a smooth handover. Julian House called in staff from other internal services including the Supported Housing

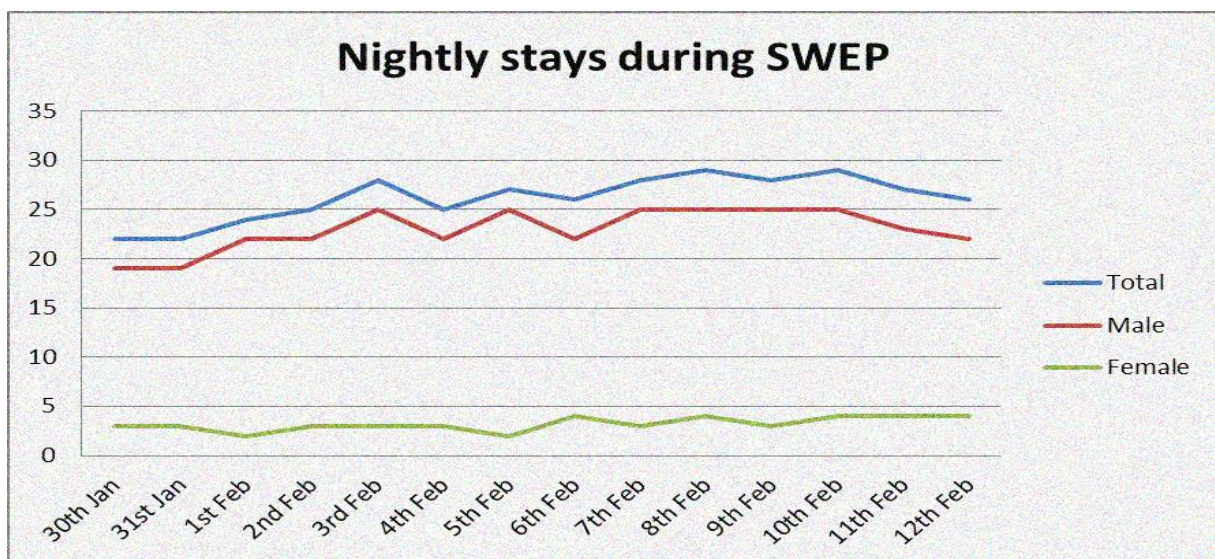
team to help fill the additional weekend slots. All these staff had previous experience of working in the Day Centre and/or Night Shelter. Additional volunteers from Julian House’s pool were drafted in to provide further support to paid staff. Service Users provided extra help by working in the kitchen and assisting with the cleaning of the building.

Reach changed their working patterns to increase the outreach service, ensuring each week day night was covered, supporting contact with and encouragement for rough sleepers in accessing the Night Shelter. Outreach staff were also able to accompany clients into the shelter if this was required and to check on the wellbeing of rough sleepers who chose to remain on the streets. . Reach staff began and ended their shift in the Night Shelter and found this beneficially in seeing how the shelter ran and in development of their relationship building with Service Users.

Extra Accommodation Provision

The 21 regularly available beds in the Night Shelter were augmented by additional provision at YMCA (4 beds with the option of more), creation of bed spaces at Julian House (4 beds in offices) and through the offer of single rooms at Dartmouth Avenue if any were available. The overall capacity to accommodate rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping was increased to circa 30 beds, with the further option of opening up an overflow shelter if need exceeded this.

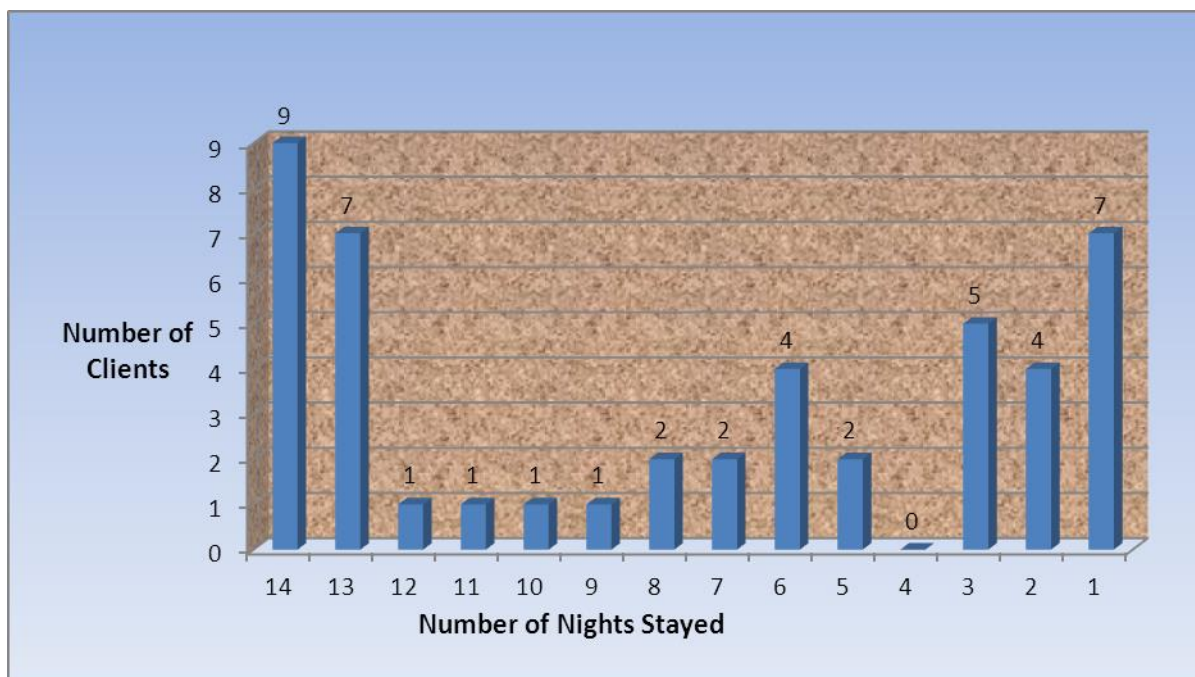
Four clients were assessed as suitable for the YMCA and moved in on the first night of SWEP which freed up beds in Julian House for higher needs Service Users. Three service users remained in the YMCA for the full duration of SWEP. One Service User was housed from the YMCA by Somer CHT and was then replaced by another in the vacant dormitory bed. All four beds at the YMCA were continuously occupied throughout the SWEP period.

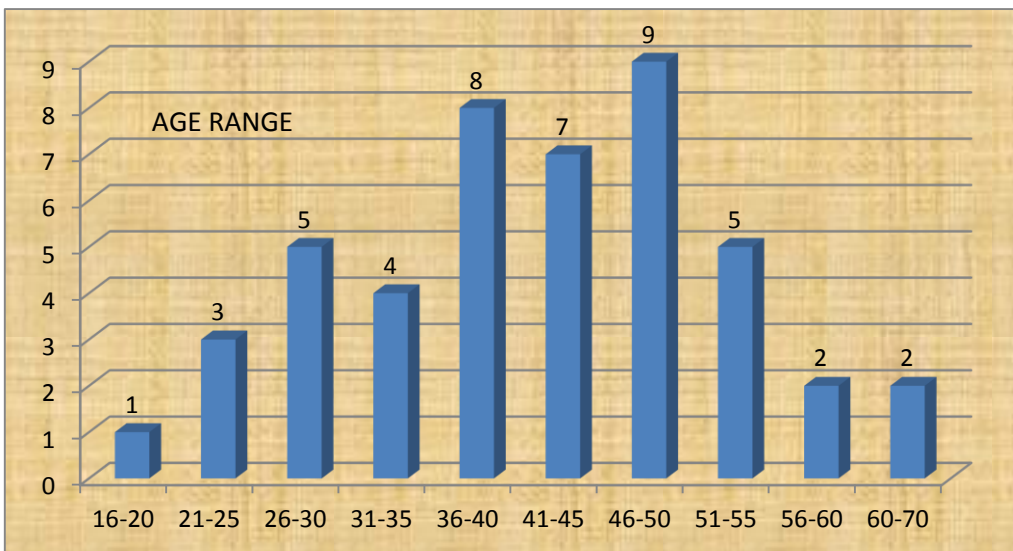
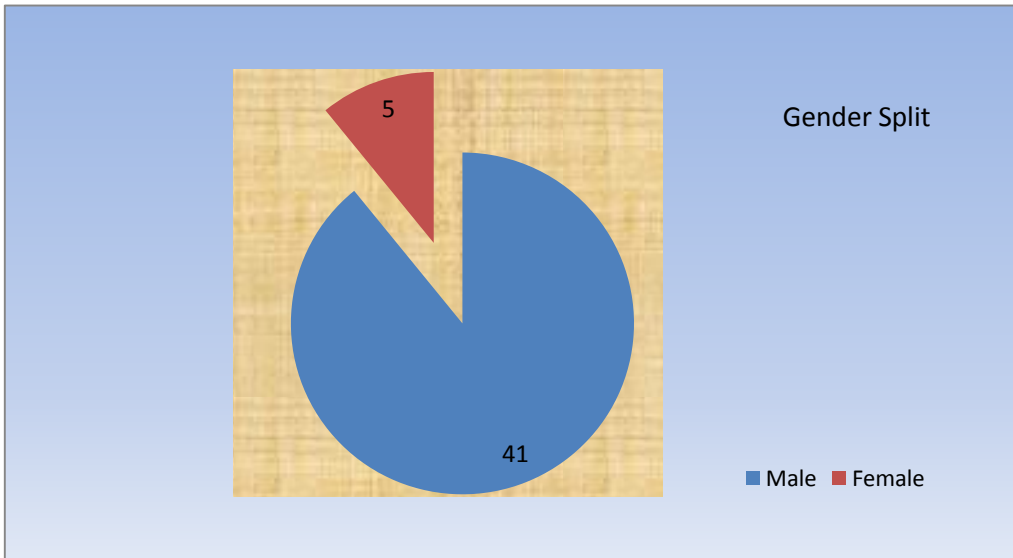


By increasing the numbers of Service Users enabled to access the Night Shelter through waiving the normal nightly service charge, reviewing and overturning all but two exclusions, (two Service Users did not have their exclusions overturned during the severe weather, due to the nature of the exclusions, which were for threats and violence towards staff and other Service Users), and by positive joint working with Reach, Julian House has had a two week opportunity to provide a comprehensive picture of homeless and rough sleeping clients in Bath. We are aware that although this picture represents a good extended snapshot of need it does exclude some clients who, despite the best efforts of services, chose to avoid contact with services. Amongst those who are therefore not included in the snapshot are some site dwellers, squatters and those who choose to rough sleep hidden away and outside of the central areas of Bath.

- Total number of individual Service Users who accessed the Night Shelter during the duration of SWEP (14 days) was 46
- On two nights occupancy in crisis beds was 29
- 365 bed nights provided over fourteen days
- The day by day figure includes four male clients at YMCA on each night
- All clients who presented to the service were able to access emergency accommodation during this period.

Consistency of Bed Usage by Client





Local Connection

In line with B&NES Re-Connection Policy all presenting rough sleepers, regardless of local connection were offered crisis accommodation on the night, this was then backed up by Day Centre staff work to re-connect the individual to the relevant Local Authority.

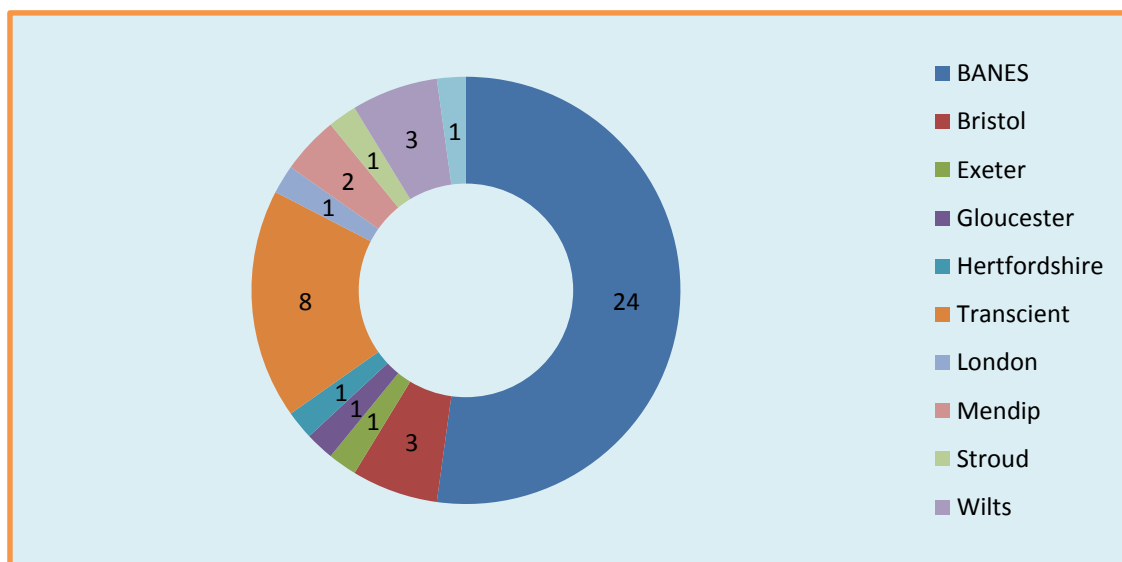
Staff dealt with multiple referrals for accommodation from other authorities but worked closely with organisations from other areas to ensure support was given in the referring area rather than the Service User coming to B&NES. Julian House took calls from all over the country seeking bed spaces but explained our lack of availability and highlighted SWEP procedures in

different areas. Telephone advice was given to housing workers from both Mendip and Wiltshire about services being provided in their own areas.

Julian House accommodated:

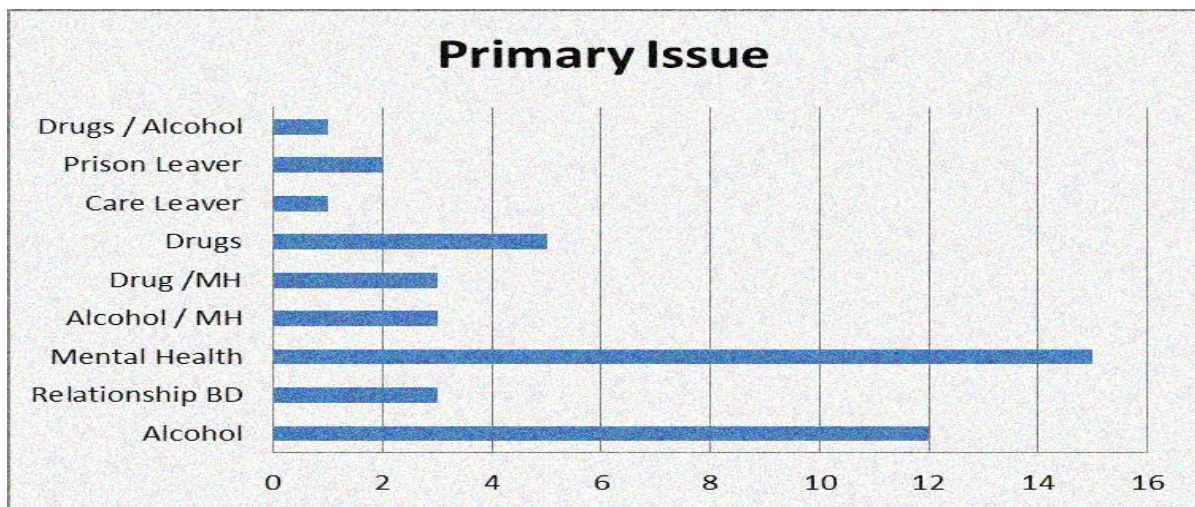
- One entrenched rough sleeper who is unwilling to claim benefits, including Housing Benefit.
- One illegal immigrant, who therefore had no recourse to public funds. Staff liaised with the UK Border Agency, but the client left after three days before any intervention was made by them.

Local Connection



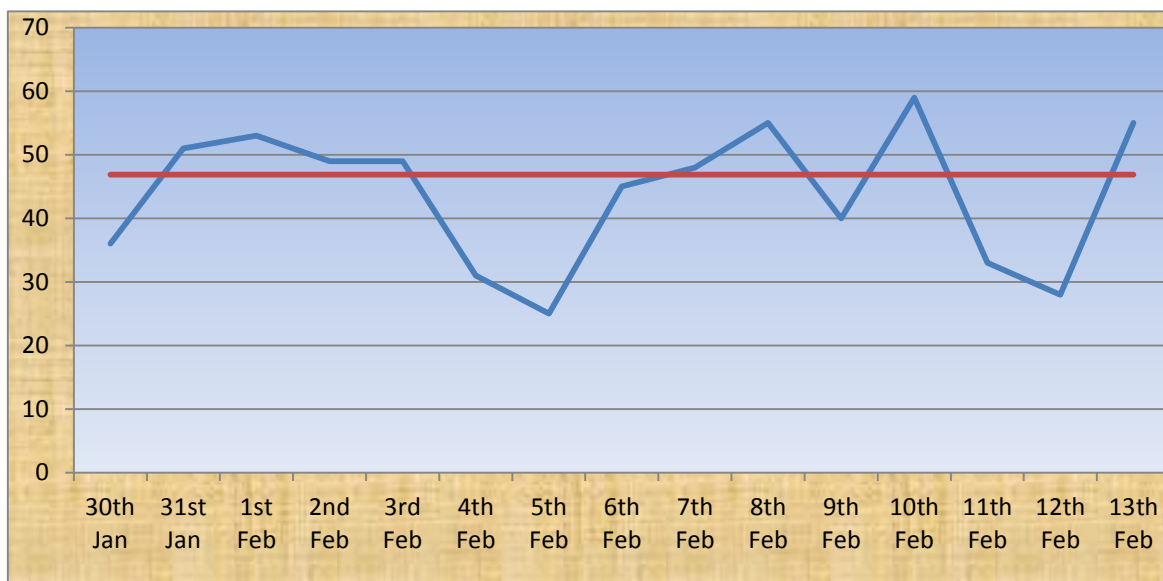
In keeping with the prevailing trend 52% (24) of Service Users had a local connection to B&NES, this rises by a further 18% (8) when those with no local connection anywhere are included. Those without an established local connection to any authority are supported and encouraged to engage with services with the intention of establishing a connection within B&NES, enabling access to all services and the prospect of moving away from homelessness to a settled and productive lifestyle. 30% (14) of those accessing the Night Shelter had a connection to another authority with 57% (8) of these presenting from neighbouring authorities.

Primary Presenting Issue



In addition to being homeless, assessment recorded primary needs as set out in the table above. 47% (21) had mental health needs, 35% (16) reported alcohol issues as a primary problem.

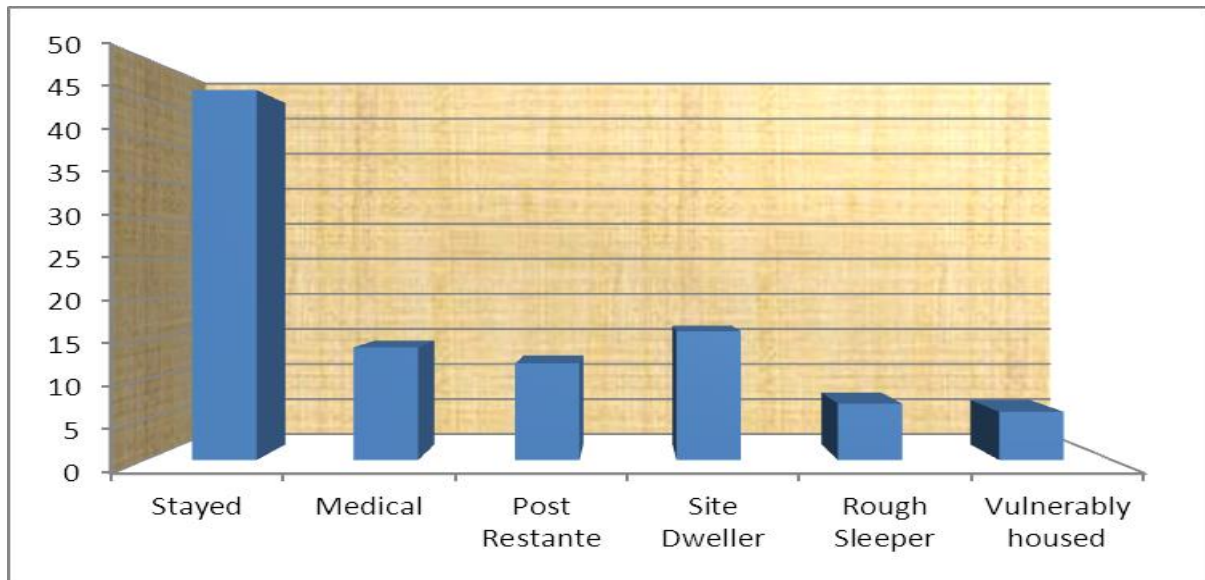
Day Centre Attendance and Average Daily Usage during SWEP



- Julian House Day Centre opened everyday throughout the SWEP period.
- 101 individual Service Users accessed the service during the SWEP period
- Average daily use of the centre was 47 people

The number of individuals using the Day Centre is more than double those who access crisis beds during the same period. Those using the Day Centre but not the Night Shelter include both housed and un-housed people who were using day services for the reasons shown in the table below.

Day Centre Attendees



The Day Centre works with a wide range of clients including those who access the Night Shelter, those who still maintain a relationship with the medical service despite moving on into independent accommodation, primarily for methadone prescribing, those clients who rough sleep and clients who are housed but are too chaotic to engage with appointment based floating support services.

Julian House has provided a safe mail address for homeless or vulnerably housed clients for many years.

When comparing our statistics with a similar period in 2010, it is apparent that the numbers of travellers who live on sites on the outskirts of the city have increased and that they too were affected by the severe weather.

Tracking and recording show that there were seven individuals who continued to sleep outside during the severe weather despite the encouragement of Julian House and Reach outreach staff for them to stay. Staff at the Day Centre and Night Shelter ensured that suitable bedding, clothes and warm food were available to those who would not stay.

Two of the rough sleepers were excluded from the night shelter, as mentioned earlier in this report, but were allowed access during the afternoon when we were closed to others so they could use the showers and other basic facilities.

We are aware that there are yet other individuals who did not access any of the SWEP services. The new Assertive Outreach Team will be working closely with other services and community groups to engage with them. Part of this work is about identifying the barriers to access and working to ensure that, should there be another cold spell, those have chosen to stay away this time, will be in contact with us and enabled to use emergency accommodation and the wraparound services that this links into.

Conclusion

SWEP was a success this year in preventing any deaths of homeless people on the streets as a result of the severe weather. This was the first year that a clear policy was in place and agencies provided a positive joined up approach to dealing with the emergency.

Julian House had a clear internal plan which had been well prepared in advance of the SWEP coming into operation. Better organisation and preparedness significantly reduced the number of recordable incidents in the shelter compared to the last severe weather period. The client group understood what and why Julian House and other services were doing and responded by getting involved themselves, helping out and being very respectful of staff, volunteers and other Service Users. Given the cramped physical facilities and overcrowding caused by severe weather, peer support and mutual tolerance have been welcome characteristics amongst the Service User group.

Julian House and key partners feel that based on the experience of this February 2012 that we will all now be better prepared for future SWEP periods. It is strongly hoped that the Assertive Outreach Service, the completion of the new design for the Night Shelter, additional bed spaces in 2nd tier satellite properties and implementation of No Second Night Out will reduce the need for emergency provision of this kind in future years.

The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol will be reviewed, based on the insights and understanding drawn from this years experience and the further understanding gained from the research detailed below.

Next Steps

The provision of crisis accommodation for rough sleepers and those without access to secure accommodation is an often unpredictable activity. Peaks and troughs in demand for bed spaces can occur for reasons that the accommodation provider may have limited understanding of and almost no control over. As it may be reasonable to expect that due to the economic downturn, consequent risk of unemployment and changes to the delivery of welfare benefits, the number of those presenting in need of crisis accommodation will

increase. In order to meet current and potentially increased demand, crisis services need to increase their understanding of the drivers on and fluctuations in demand. Assessment of occupancy in the Night Shelter, before during and after the SWEP period has prompted Julian House to undertake two pieces of investigative research:

Understanding fluctuating demand – through

- tracking and interviewing clients who stay only intermittently at the Night Shelter,
- using the increased intelligence provided by enhanced levels of homeless outreach
- through using the resources of the wider partnership to provide alerts on new squats or instances of flat invasion.

Analysis of Day Centre use by those other than people staying in the Night Shelter – through

- gathering multi agency information on those using the Day Centre during SWEP
- focussed interviews with non Night Shelter users in the Day Centre

Both of these investigations will report back to the wider partnership in the summer of 2012.

Acknowledgements

Julian House would like to thank the following partner agencies and services for their direct and indirect support in the success of SWEP implementation this year: B&NES Housing Options, Genesis Lifeline Centre, Reach, the police and community support officers, Shape, YMCA and the general public of Bath who supported the project generously through their donations of food, warm clothing, bedding and local intelligence of where hidden rough sleepers were to be found.

References

Information on Extended Cold Weather Provision & Preparing for Winter: Guidance for Day Centres – Homeless Link 2011

B&NES Severe Weather Emergency Protocol – published 2012

B&NES Re-connection Policy & Procedure – published 2010 (Reviewed 2011)

No Second Night Out – DCLG 2011

