Working together to provide accommodation and services for people sleeping rough this winter

Partners in Oxford Homeless Movement are working together to provide accommodation and services for people experiencing rough sleeping in Oxford this winter.

Once again, Oxford City Council is teaming up with Aspire, Homeless Oxfordshire and St Mungo’s to provide emergency beds for anyone who wants to come inside during freezing winter weather.

Under the severe weather emergency protocol (SWEP), the council consults with partners to activate emergency beds whenever the Met Office forecasts freezing overnight temperatures and during other severe winter weather. St Mungo’s – which runs the assessment and outreach service OxSPOT – then tells people who are sleeping rough that SWEP is open and allocates them a space in one of three venues if they want a bed for the night.

When venues open in the evening, outreach becomes a provider as St Mungo’s runs SWEP at Simon House. Homeless Oxfordshire and Aspire provide emergency beds at O’Hanlon House and in East Oxford respectively.

Staff from all three organisations perform extra shifts on top of their day jobs to provide emergency beds and keep SWEP running as smoothly as possible. This is the first year that SWEP is being activated on every freezing night and also the first time that people have been allocated spaces at designated venues in advance. Until this year, they would have to go to O’Hanlon House every evening before they knew where their bed for the night would be.

Emergency beds have been needed on four nights already this winter. The first activation of SWEP on 18 November is 11 days earlier than the only other time
beds have opened in November. This happened in 2016 when SWEP was activated on a forecast of three freezing nights rather than a single night.

Up to 13 beds are also now available in a winterlong shelter in Simon House. These are open to anybody experiencing rough sleeping - regardless of their connection to Oxford and whether or not they can claim benefits or housing. Referrals to the winter shelter must be made through OxSPOT.

From 1 January until the end of March, Churches Together in Oxford will reopen the Oxford Winter Night Shelter (OWNS). OWNS offers 20 beds a night in churches for people who have been verified and referred by OxSPOT. Last winter, 55 people used OWNS and more than half of them did not return to sleeping rough.

OWNS is still looking for volunteers for this winter and people can sign up through the OWNS website.

Winter provision is not just about beds and day services can help people come in and get respite from the cold.

Homeless Oxfordshire provides day services from its O'Hanlon House hostel in Luther Street from 10 am to 3 pm on weekdays and from 10 am to 2 pm on weekends. O'Hanlon House provides shower and laundry facilities, and two meals a day. These are available to any verified rough sleeper and users of day services can also access services provided to hostel residents – including training, education and activities.

The Porch day centre in Magdalen Road provides day long support six days a week. Its services include two cheap hot meals a day, shower and laundry facilities, clothing, and a range of activities including ICT training and allotment work.

The Gatehouse is at 10 Woodstock Road, and provides a drop-in café six days a week. It also offers free internet access, a clothes store and art, literacy and computer activities groups. This winter, The Gatehouse has also teamed up with the churches to open for people using OWNS between 8am and 10am on weekdays.
How you can help with Oxford Homeless Movement

Oxford Homeless Movement is a partnership of the many organisations working to ensure that nobody has to sleep rough on the streets of Oxford. It is hoping to raise £150,000 for charities helping people rough sleeping and to deliver new services reducing homelessness.

Between Sunday 1 December and Monday 6 January, Oxfordshire Community Foundation (OCF) is pledging to match any donation to Oxford Homeless Movement through a Christmas Match Fund.

OCF’s pledge to double the difference will apply to both one-off and repeat donations made during the Christmas period. When eligible for Gift Aid, a typical £30 donation will be worth £67.50 to beneficiaries of the Christmas Match Fund.

You can donate online at www.oxfordhomelessmovement.org.uk/donate or by sending a cheque to Oxford Homeless Movement, PO Box 941, Oxford OX1 9TQ.

“Oxford comes together to help people experiencing rough sleeping as the winter hits. From the students helping people access emergency beds in freezing weather to the volunteers in the churches’ winter shelter, people care and want to help. And you can help too.

“The city council works with Oxford’s dedicated homeless charities to provide extra winter services and has been successful in winning extra money from the government. More is needed. On #GivingTuesday, you can help meet the needs of people on the streets now and to support new services in future. Donate to Oxford Homeless Movement during the festive season and make double the difference with the Christmas Match Fund.”

Jane Cranston, chair of Oxford Homeless Movement
Notes to editors

About Oxford Homeless Movement
Oxford Homeless Movement is a partnership of the many organisations working to ensure that nobody has to sleep rough on the streets of Oxford. It aims to bring greater visibility to all Oxford’s work in this area, guiding volunteers, supporters and homeless people alike to the actions or services they’re looking for.

Oxford Homeless Movement’s initiatives already include:

- a website (www.oxfordhomelessmovement.org.uk) to link those who want to offer their support with the organisations or individuals that are providing support to people experiencing rough sleeping. It also offers guidance to those who need help and may not know where to go
- a citywide charter to ensure nobody should have to sleep rough on the streets of Oxford, co-created by Oxford’s homelessness agencies, charities, voluntary organisations and Oxford City Council. Anyone can sign up to the charter on the website
- the launch of the Lived Experience Advisory Forum, made up of people who have experienced rough sleeping and who are either now working for or supported by local agencies. The forum aims to take a leadership role in Oxford Homeless Movement.

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For more information
Email info@oxfordhomelessmovement.org.uk or call Oxford City Council Press Office on 01865 252096.