



# Internal Audit Report

## Rough Sleeping Statistics

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Prepared for Brighton & Hove City Council

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## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 At Audit and Standards Committee on 8 January 2019, Members requested that Internal Audit carry out an investigation into the reliability of the rough sleeping statistics quoted to the NICE Committee (3 December 2018), which stated that the number of rough sleepers in Brighton & Hove had fallen since the last year. The letter that generated the request is attached at Appendix A.
- 1.2 In 2017 the rough sleeping figure was reported as 178. In 2018 the reported figure was 64.

## 2. Scope and Objectives

- 2.1 Internal Audit reviewed the methodologies used to produce the rough sleeping statistics for 2017 and 2018 and checked to ensure that these had been calculated correctly and in accordance with national definitions. Specifically to;
- Establish whether the statistics used at the NICE Committee in December 2018 were based on reliable and relevant data.
  - To establish whether there were any differences between the methodology underlying the 2017 and 2018 data.

## 3. Summary of Findings

- 3.1 The formal definition of rough sleeping is *“People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, sheds, car parks, or “bashes”).”* The definition excludes those people in hostels or shelters, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organised protest, squatters or Travellers.
- 3.2 Any rough sleeping counts are undertaken late at night to exclude street beggars, and other individuals who do not sleep on the streets (ie: those who have some form of shelter).
- 3.3 There are two available methods to produce the rough sleeping statistic for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). These are a) an estimated methodology; or b) a full-count option. In 2017, the estimated methodology was used. Following discussions with the MHCLG, in 2018 the full-count method was used.
- 3.4 The processes followed in both 2017 and 2018 were reviewed, and found to be compliant with national guidance. All rough sleeping returns submitted by local authorities are independently verified and validated by Homeless Link to ensure they are robust. Homeless Link are the national charity for organisations working directly with people who become homeless, and they were in attendance during the estimate (in 2017) and at the full count (in 2018). Homeless Link are funded by MHCLG to provide verification, validation, and guidance to local authorities for the annual rough sleeping street count and evidence-based estimate process.

- 3.5 In 2017, the official figure of 178 people was calculated using the estimate methodology. This comprised of data submitted from local partners:
- St Mungo's
  - Brighton Housing Trust
  - Project Anti-Freeze
  - Clock Tower Sanctuary
  - Downslink YMCA
  - Sussex Police
  - Equinox
  - St Anne's Day Centre

The data was collated to provide an agreed figure for one night in November. The council used this estimate method in the previous three years.

- 3.6 The official 2018 rough sleeping figure for the council is 64 people. This figure was established by pooling one night of research undertaken across the city. Teams of outreach workers and volunteers worked together to make a record of people bedded down in the city after midnight and through the early hours of Wednesday 21 November 2018.
- 3.7 From a review of the Independent Verifier's 2018 report, which accompanied the return, it was noted that on the night of the count (the date having been set some six-weeks in advance) that *"there was heavy snowfall, which settled in many places, around 01:30am, the forecast had been for 2 degrees and sleet showers, so this was totally unexpected. Although it didn't affect the total number, as people in SWEP<sup>1</sup> were already counted, there may have already been some disruption to people's choice of sleep sites from the sleet or from people finding shelter other than SWEP."*
- 3.8 The Independent Verifier's report also commented that reductions (from 2017's figure) may *"also be attributed to the NSNO<sup>2</sup> Hub and RSI<sup>3</sup> funded units, and extended outreach team with RSI funded posts."* It was also noted that the Churches night shelter opened earlier this year than previously.

#### 4. Conclusions

- 4.1 Both the counts and estimate single night snapshots provide a way of indicating the number of people sleeping rough and assessing change over time. There is currently no national mechanism for recording every person who sleeps rough across the year. The single night snapshot methodology aims to get as accurate a representation of the number of people sleeping rough as possible, while acknowledging that each process has its limitations.
- 4.2 We therefore conclude that the rough sleeper statistics stated at the NICE Committee in December 2018 were based on reliable and relevant data.

#### 5. Acknowledgements

- 5.1 We would like to thank all staff that provided assistance during the course of this work.

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<sup>1</sup> SWEP – severe emergency weather protocol

<sup>2</sup> NSNO – no second night out

<sup>3</sup> RSI – rough sleepers initiative



