

Subject:	Items referred from 17 December Council meeting - Deputations	
Date of Meeting:	20 January 2021	
Report of:	Executive Lead Officer for Strategy, Governance & Law	
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Wards Affected:	Various	

FOR GENERAL RELEASE**1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:**

- 1.1 To receive the following deputation referred from the Council meeting held on the 17 December 2020.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Committee responds to the deputation either by noting it or where it is considered more appropriate, calls for an officer report on the matter which may give consideration to a range of options and writes to the deputation spokesperson setting out the committee's decision(s).

3. CONTEXT / BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 To receive the following deputation along with the extract from the council meeting and supporting information which is detailed in appendix 1:

(1) Deputation concerning SWEP

Spokesperson David Thomas

Supported by: Barry Hughes, David Croydon, Jim Deans, Daniel Harris, Charles Harrison

Summary

This deputation concerns two groups of homeless people in Brighton & Hove. In this cold winter in the middle of the pandemic, this council has decided that although it has helped these two groups in the past it is now no longer prepared to do so.

SWEP: The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol, or SWEP, is what every local authority has to do to provide shelter to rough sleepers, anyone at all, when the weather is bad. In this city we have generous criteria for opening SWEP. Last year, when it was open, it was announced on the council's website and emails were sent to community groups, and everyone knew that you could go down to the shelter at Brighton Town Hall between 7 and 10pm and get shelter and something to eat, and people could tell the rough sleepers they knew that it was open.

This year there is the pandemic, and so arrangements have to be different to be covid-safe. Despite the “everyone in” programme, there are still many rough sleepers, and more every day – the council estimates 30. But also – and this has nothing to do with any pandemic – it is secret. This year we have Secret SWEP. It is not announced on the website when it is open, we don’t know where it is, and the community groups are not being told anything. St Mungo’s outreach workers, we are told, will contact the people they know about and tell them. We know this is not reaching everybody. On Monday morning 7th December, when the triggers were met and it was miserably cold, Jim Deans had two men waiting for him at his office in the morning who had used SWEP last year and would have used it this year, but who had no idea it was open. The only reason given for this is that if people knew it was open they might arrive from outside Brighton. That is not good enough, it is a disgrace.

NRPF: In March this year in the first wave of the pandemic the government asked local authorities to “bring everyone in”, to offer accommodation to everyone who was homeless. There are some people living here who have “no recourse to public funds”, NRPF; they are people with limited leave to remain, or none, who are not normally entitled to help unless they have children or serious care needs. The government said these should be accommodated too, but they wouldn’t change the NRPF rules, despite many people including this Council asking them to, so the council had to pay the full cost for this group under their emergency public health powers.

Nevertheless, the city has looked after this group through the pandemic so far, and that was the position when the administration changed from Labour to the Green party. However, in the last few weeks, this council has decided that they will not be helped any more.

Here are two groups of homeless people who need help this cold and wet winter; rough sleepers who St Mungo’s can’t reach, and people with NRPF who have no other resource. We call on the council to reverse its policies, to let the community know when and where SWEP is open so that we can help people who need it to get shelter, and to make “everyone in” so that it includes absolutely everyone in this City of Sanctuary.

APPENDIX - SWEP

Brighton & Hove has generous opening criteria for SWEP. However, if people don't know about it or can't get to it, that makes no difference.

David Thomas for the Housing Coalition asked a supplementary question at the last Housing Committee on 18th November, as follows:

"Homeless Link national guidance on the operation of SWEP says: 'Simple and effective communication is essential. If SWEP is going to open, **this information needs to be shared quickly and as widely as possible**, for example via the website and social media channels of the local authority and partners' ... In Brighton and Hove we have a large network of concerned community organisations, including our own SHS and many others. In the past information has been put out to and through this network. Will you ensure that information gets out to the community as early as possible in the future?"

The Council response was as follows:

Our street outreach partners St Mungo's are currently working in the city seven days a week to engage with everyone rough sleeping to help support them into safe accommodation.

Some people with complex needs can find it difficult to move from the streets, and we are aware there are around 30 people currently sleeping rough in the city.

When SWEP is triggered, St Mungo's Street Outreach Service will go out seeking the people we know to be rough sleeping during the day to find them self-contained warm accommodation. Anyone not accommodated during the day will be referred into self-contained accommodation in our newly-commissioned council-run SWEP venue by the street outreach service.

For these reasons, we will not be publicly announcing when SWEP is triggered this winter. We have also found the wider publicity has increased the inflow of rough sleepers in to the city from elsewhere, placing greater pressure on the service and restricting our ability to support homeless people with a local connection to Brighton & Hove.

If a member of the public sees someone rough sleeping, please report them via the Streetlink website or by calling 0300 500 0914 and our outreach team will seek to accommodate them.

The Streetlink service promises a response within 48 hours and cannot provide an emergency service. This is Secret SWEP. The reason given (for which there is no evidence; the only study undertaken says that the quality of homeless services is not a significant factor in homeless people coming to Brighton and Hove¹) would prevent any improvement in homeless services whatsoever. It is also in defiance of the national guidance for this year.

The council repeated essentially the same facts in a press release on 10th December.²

¹ "Picture the Change" by Homeless Link/CAIERS, 2015; we can provide a copy to any interested.

² <https://www.theargus.co.uk/news/18933978.brighton-hove-opens-severe-weather-shelter-rough-sleepers/>

COUNCIL

4.30pm 17 DECEMBER 2020

VIRTUAL

MINUTES

Present: Councillors Robins (Chair), Mears (Deputy Chair), Allcock, Appich, Atkinson, Bagaeen, Barnett, Bell, Brennan, Brown, Childs, Clare, Davis, Deane, Druitt, Ebel, Evans, Fishleigh, Fowler, Gibson, Grimshaw, Hamilton, Heley, Henry, Hill, Hills, Hugh-Jones, Janio, Knight, Lewry, Littman, Lloyd, Mac Cafferty, McNair, Miller, Moonan, Nemeth, Nield, O'Quinn, Osborne, Peltzer Dunn, Phillips, Pissaridou, Platts, Powell, Shanks, Simson, C Theobald, Wares, West, Wilkinson, Williams and Yates.

PART ONE

65 DEPUTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

(2) SEWP

Spokesperson David Thomas

- 65.1 The Mayor reported that two deputations had been received from members of the public and that he would invite the spokesperson to introduce their deputation and for the relevant Chair to respond. He noted that 15minutes were set aside for the consideration of deputations.
- 65.6 The Mayor welcomed David Thomas to the meeting and invited her to address the Council.
- 65.7 Mr. Thomas thanked the Mayor and referred to the deputation and outlined the concerns in relation to the use of SWEP and ensuring that homeless people were able to access the service during times of need.
- 65.8 Councillor Gibson thanked Mr Thomas for the deputation and stated that it was difficult to give a full response in view of the constraints that related to the judicial review. He hoped that a more comprehensive response could be given at the Housing Committee but wanted to confirm that the Council was committed to supporting homeless people and to work within the law to enable them to find accommodation.
- 65.9 The Mayor thanked Mr. Thomas for joining the meeting and noted that the deputation would be referred to the Housing Committee for consideration. The persons forming the deputation would be invited to attend the meeting and would be informed subsequently of any action to be taken or proposed in relation to the matter set out in the deputation.