

Brighton & Hove City Council

HOUSING & NEW HOMES COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 48 (c)

Subject: Members Letters

Date of Meeting: 24 January 2024

Report of: Executive Lead Officer for Strategy, Governance & Law

Contact Officer: Shaun Hughes
E-mail: shaun.hughes@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

1.1 To receive any Members letters submitted to Democratic Services.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.2 That the Committee responds to the Members letters.

To: Will Tuckley
Chief Executive Office
Brighton and Hove City Council
Hove Town Hall
Norton Road
Hove, BN3 3BQ

LETTER TO HOUSING & NEW HOMES COMMITTEE

Dear Will,

I am submitting the following letter under Council Procedure Rule 23.3 to be included on the agenda for the Housing and New Homes Committee meeting of 24th January 2024.

As temperatures drop during the winter months, the council's Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) service is activated. As I'm sure you're aware, SWEP operates outside usual eligibility and entitlement frameworks that govern access to housing. It should be accessible to everyone, including all those who may otherwise be excluded from services; people with restrictions due to immigration status, people who may have previously been excluded or banned from services, and those with no local connection.

A street pastor who does significant outreach work with the street community in my ward communicated that the current format of the Brighton & Hove SWEP service is based on a referral system that is slowing down the ability for those sleeping rough to access the service. That the referrals are not instantaneous, in that they need to be picked up by the team on shift, then actioned by sending someone out to "verify" the person is a rough sleeper, and this can take up to 36 hours in some cases.

I can confirm that when I reported a rough sleeper to the SWEP service at 9:30PM on January 8th there was a lag in the response to verify the rough sleeper, and the team got to them by 8AM the next morning. In this particular case, the individual refused help from the service – there can be many complex reasons why rough sleepers refuse help.

I appreciate that the referral system in place allows the SWEP team to triage appropriately, and I can see that it has important benefits. However, at the same time an element may be missing which is the option for rough sleepers to simply 'turn up' and be dealt with 'on the door' in a timely manner. That they have the option of a safe and warm place to sleep, without being formally brought into council services.

As I investigated the guidance shared with local authorities as to implementing best practice for SWEP services, I came across Homeless Link's winter provision and SWEP toolkit guide – a resource drafted to support local authorities and partner agencies to provide emergency accommodation to people sleeping rough during cold weather. They highlight that the process of verification (confirming someone has been seen sleeping rough) is sometimes used to ensure that people who are most in need are prioritised for accommodation, however, a flexible approach should be adopted. That people should not be sent back onto the streets to be verified. They also highlighted that individuals often have good reasons for concealing their sleep sites, for example, due to vulnerability to assault or fears of enforcement, and so verification of rough sleeping should not be used as a barrier to offer SWEP.

Museum of Homelessness (MoH), who led a six-month investigation into SWEP services provided by 91 local authorities across the UK, over two years of activity, found that SWEP is often offered conditionally, when it should be an emergency humanitarian offer, open to all. That a conditional approach requires rough sleepers to meet certain criteria or behave a certain way to receive help.

It is obvious that the team who manage the SWEP service work incredibly hard and are doing their utmost to support those who are rough sleeping across the city. This letter does not set out to criticise their work, but rather **calls for a review of the referral's process of the service, which has been reported to me as creating a barrier to access for those looking for shelter. Is there a way to facilitate a turn-up at the door process, where the person sleeping rough has the option to accept ongoing support or not?**

The Government advice for those with responsibilities for people sleeping rough in England, is that "*they should develop best practice by collaborating with local authorities, relevant partners, and **people sleeping rough**, to provide mutual support and share learning.*" I think an important point to note here is **that we should be engaging in a listening exercise with the people this service is designed to support. To speak with people sleeping rough and seek to co-**

produce provision, as this is likely to increase take-up and positive outcomes.

If there is one too many barriers in place to access the service, how can we help them?

As I read the 2023 -2027 Directorate Plan for Housing, Neighbourhoods and Communities, I can see that “*a responsive council with well-run services*” is a key goal. To be responsive is to listen and I hope this request to review the referrals process for SWEP will be acknowledged.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Ellen McLeay
Green Party
West Hill & North Laine

References:

[Supporting vulnerable people before and during cold weather: people homeless and sleeping rough - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/100000/Supporting_vulnerable_people_before_and_during_cold_weather_people_homeless_and_sleeping_rough.pdf)

https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/SWEP_and_Winter_Provision_Toolkit_Nov_23.pdf

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/623b05f9825aa34cda99921f/t/6423301d2f6abf0202364811/1680027696562/Severe+Weather+Emergency+a+Museum+of+Homelessness+Investigation+2023.pdf>

