

Chief Executive and
Cllr Miller, Chair of the Audit &
Standards Committee

Date: 8th January 2019
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Dear Councillor Miller,

RE: MISREPRESENTATION OF ROUGH-SLEEPING STATISTICS

We write to request an urgent investigation, with subsequent report, to be brought back to the next Audit & Standards Committee, as part of its responsibility for overseeing and monitoring performance, into the way in which a key piece of rough-sleeping data has been calculated and represented by the Administration.

Statements at a meeting of the Neighbourhoods, Inclusion, Communities & Equalities ('NICE') Committee and by council press release give the impression that the number of rough-sleepers in Brighton & Hove has fallen since last year. However, the stated methodology behind the data collection exercise is clearly in conflict with any such claim being made. We wish to understand if there is more information that has not been released, or if the information is incorrect.

At the meeting of NICE Committee on 3rd December 2018, it was announced by Cllr Clare Moonan, the Administration's spokesman for rough-sleeping that the number of rough-sleepers in Brighton & Hove had significantly dropped. We quote directly:

"The official figure verified by the independent organisation Homeless Link is 64. If you remember the official figure last November was 178. So this represents a significant drop."

The Administration's press release is set out below and, similarly, just two figures are mentioned in a way that could mislead. The only figures that are mentioned are 64 and 178. The following claim is made:

"The number of people rough sleeping in Brighton & Hove is going down."

If the number of rough-sleepers on a given date in November had fallen from 178 in 2017 to 64 in 2018, we would be delighted. However, the data comes from two different collection methods which cannot be compared.

The 2017 figure was collected using the thorough 'estimate' method which sees a number of data sources pulled together to give an estimate of the number of rough-sleepers. The 2018 figure uses the 'count' method. It is simply a count of heads on a certain night and obviously subject to variance depending on weather conditions.

Given that the count was carried out on one of the most dreadful nights of the year, in snowy conditions, it was obviously lower on that particular night. It would be wrong to compare the two.

Brighton & Hove Independent reported the matters as follows (as a demonstration of how confusion arose):

“The city has seen a ‘significant drop’ in rough sleepers over a year if the latest council figures are to be believed.”

Jim Deans of Sussex Homeless Support was highly critical of the exercise and commented as follows:

“At the moment, there are around 140 rough sleepers and many thousand more homeless in temporary or emergency accommodation, vans, caravans, boats or a mate’s floor.”

We are calling for a report to clear up the matter properly to avoid the Council falling into disrepute. We wish to know why it was claimed that the numbers of rough-sleeping had fallen when there does not appear to be any data to support this.

With best wishes

Cllr Robert Nemeth – Opposition Spokesman for NICE

Cllr Mary Mears – Opposition Spokesman for Housing & New Homes

Cllr Nick Taylor – Opposition Spokesman for Health & Wellbeing