

Report to: Scrutiny Committee

Date: 24 March 2021

Title: Homelessness placements into Eastbourne by Brighton and Hove City Council

Report of: Director of Service Delivery

Ward(s): All

Purpose of report: Information and background.

Officer recommendation(s): (1) That the report be noted.

Reasons for recommendations: The Scrutiny Committee resolved at its previous meeting that an additional meeting would be arranged, and a report produced detailing the issues around the placing of homeless households in Eastbourne by Brighton and Hove City Council.

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the concerns regarding ongoing and increasing numbers of homeless households placed into the Eastbourne area by Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC).
- 1.2 The report is provided for information purposes only. It outlines the activities of another local authority (BHCC) and the impact of these placements, and as such there are no recommendations to the panel for changes to our own policy, spending or so on.

2 Overview

- 2.1 Since the 'Everyone In' initiative in March 2020, BHCC have placed huge numbers of homeless households out of area. The vast majority of the out of area placements have been made into Eastbourne and this is having a significant and unsustainable impact on local services.
- 2.2 The current number of placements by BHCC across Eastbourne now stands at 197 households (figure correct at time of publication) and to date, there has been

no strategic plan shared with us to demonstrate how this number will be reduced.

3 Background

- 3.1 In March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced the 'Everyone In' directive. Local Housing Authorities across the country were required to accommodate every rough sleeper in their area, regardless of eligibility, priority need or any other issues. This unprecedented move was to support those living on the street to socially distance and ensure access to amenities as most shops, toilets etc were closed.
- 3.2 The MHCLG also announced that Hotels who had been forced to close due to lockdown, could re-open if they were supporting the local authorities to house rough sleepers. This was a move that supported both parties: the hoteliers could remain in business, and the authorities, most of whom had exhausted all of their usual emergency accommodation options, had rooms in which to place the extra individuals
- 3.3 One of the biggest concerns has been the number of placements in Eastbourne from other authorities. While out of area placements is an ongoing challenge for every authority (particularly those similar to ours who may offer cheaper alternatives than neighbouring towns and cities) it has become more prevalent during lockdown, as our numerous seafront hotels and B&Bs seek to stay in business by working with a wide range of agencies this includes East Sussex Housing Authorities, Housing Authorities from other counties, East Sussex County Council, Probation and the Home Office. However, no other authority is placing in the Eastbourne area at such a rate as BHCC.
- 3.4 The requirement to deliver 'Everyone In' was quietly drawn to a close by the MHCLG in around May 2020. However, BHCC continued with the policy, accommodating all rough sleepers in the area. In September 2020, the rate of these placements by BHCC and the wider impact on services in Eastbourne became apparent. At the time of our briefing to members in September 2020, BHCC had confirmed that it had placed a total of 134 households in Eastbourne, (some households may have more than one individual). By comparison Eastbourne Borough Council (EBC) the time had roughly 150 placements in total. BHCC have stated that there simply is not accommodation available in their area, which is why they are placing elsewhere.
- 3.5 The impact of BHCC 'out of area' placements is significant. Many are single people, and with a variety of support needs. The 5x local housing authorities across East Sussex have jointly commissioned a Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) which works across the county with complex needs cases. The service includes a multi-disciplinary team who provide intensive specialist support to individuals and fast-track access into statutory support pathways (including health, mental health and substance misuse treatment). There is a county agreement to place RSI cases locally wherever possible, but due to a lack of local stock, on occasion we have needed to place clients out of area. The RSI have had exceptional

results in terms of placement sustainment and engagement with services. They have reported that to date, all out of area placements have failed.

- 3.6 When these placements from BHCC end for any given reason, the individual is under no obligation to return to BHCC, and many will simply remain in the area, rough sleeping or in other unstable arrangements. This places additional burdens on our outreach and rough sleeping teams who then must pick up these cases, again often with little background information. Some can be reconnected with support from our teams, others will continue to receive support from local services including foodbanks, floating support, health and social care services and of course enforcement from Police and Probation.
- 3.7 In addition, there has been no specific plans or commitment shared with us that promises to stop placements in our area or reduce the current numbers.

4 Current Picture

- 4.1 Since September 2020, Eastbourne Borough Council (EBC) has been in regular dialogue with Brighton, from front line managers up to chief executive level, to better understand the picture, share the concerns and encourage this practice to stop. At the very least we have asked that out of area placements be made across wider geographical area, not be solely focused on Eastbourne.
- 5 In addition to meetings with MHCLG, there have been several multi-agency meetings, and key partners including the Police, Probation, Adult Social Care and the RSI as well as colleagues from Health, Housing and the private sector have expressed their concerns.

The range of concerns includes, but is not limited to:

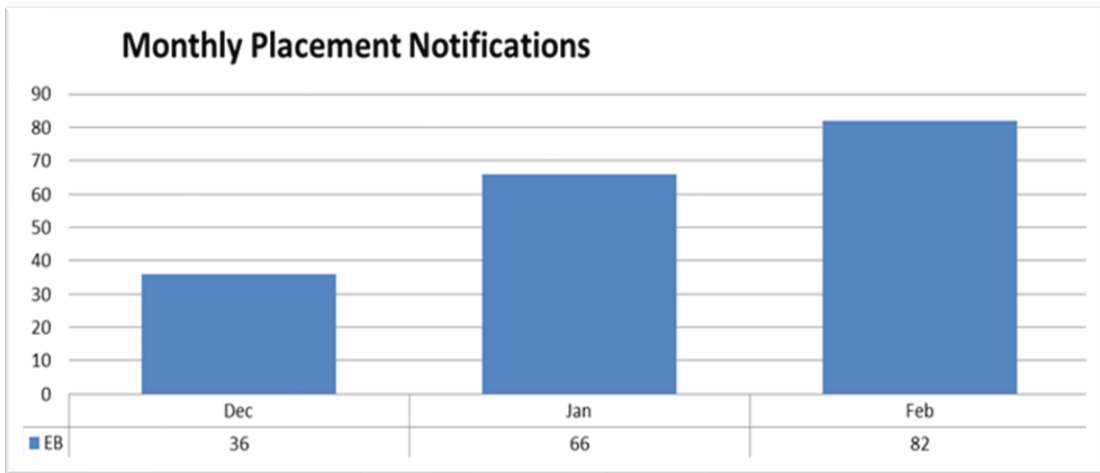
- Volume of placements and the impact of this on services
- Vulnerability of clients being placed, the lack of support or access to support provided by BHCC.
- Minimal risk assessment or risk management when placing clients with multiple complex needs.
- Impact on Probation services who must pick up clients in their area often without notification (Kendal court in particular)
- Increased demand on local charities and food providers, which also blurs the lines when assessing actual need.
- Impact on delivery of health provision through RSI
- Impact on verified rough sleeping figures.
- Increase in street activity and begging, ASB particularly as we move into warmer months.
- Risk of an increase of cuckooing and county lines as unknown offenders are placed in the area without sufficient communication to criminal justice partners.
- Lack of apparent strategic planning to reduce placements in EBC, or to seek alternative locations across a wider geographical area.

Since September, placements in EBC have steadily *increased* despite concerns raised at the very highest levels.

5 Notifications

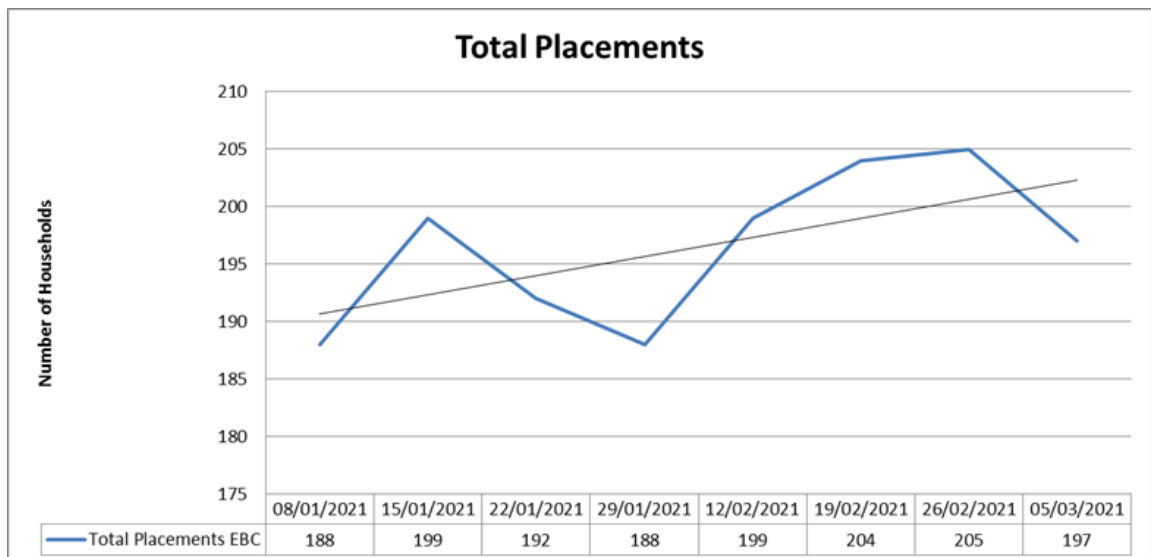
- 5.1 We have a protocol in place whereby BHCC notify named members of the EBC Housing Needs team each time they make a new placement in our area. We do not receive notification when a placement *ends*, as this is not covered by the legislation. However, we also receive weekly 'snapshot' reports that show the total number of placements in the area at that time.
- 5.2 The number of notifications of new placements has continued to increase over the last few months since this protocol was agreed, as outlined below:

Monthly Placement Notifications		
Month	Placements	% increase from previous month
Dec	36	
Jan	66	83%
Feb	82	24%
Total new placement notifications	184	



6 Total current placements

- 6.1 The total number of current placements in EBC, taken from BHCC's weekly snapshot report, has not shown any significant reduction since reporting began in December, in fact it has *increased*, and has remained at around the 200 mark for the last four weeks, as indicated in the graph below:



6.2 The current figures represent an increase of 47% for placements in EBC since September 2020, when we first raised our concerns with colleagues in BHCC Housing Needs Team.

6.3 By way of comparison EBC currently have only 127 households in emergency accommodation in total. We have only 5 households placed out of borough by us, such as in other towns in East Sussex or in Kent, all of whom we are committed to bringing back into area within 6 weeks of placement, or whom have been placed out of area for their own safety.

Funding

6.4 The MHCLG Next Steps Accommodation Programme (NSAP) has awarded local authorities two sets of grant funding:

- Short-term funds for accommodation, support and move-on costs until March 31st, 2020.
- Capita grant over 4 years towards the acquisition of properties for sustainable long term move on options.

6.5 BHCC were awarded a combined amount of over £6 million as part of this programme. This was the largest grant outside of London. EBC's NSAP grants amount to around £2.5million, which is being utilised towards the costs of emergency accommodation, security, and longer term move-on acquisitions for those rough sleepers who have been accommodated by us since the start of the pandemic.

7 Financial appraisal

7.1 There are no significant legal/financial implications because of the report.

8 Legal implications

8.1 There are no significant legal/financial implications because of the report.

9 Risk management implications

- 9.1 STRATEGIC and DEPARTMENTAL RISKS – the significant increase in placements into Eastbourne may prevent or delay our strategic objectives to reduce rough sleeping and activity within the street community. When placements breakdown through lack of support and those clients resort to rough sleeping in our area, this affects our verification counts, and impact upon KPIs to reduce rough sleeping for the RSI. We receive significant funding for rough sleeping work, so any impact on performance is hugely concerning. Risk to key partners are outlined in this document, and these all have knock on effects in preventing homelessness. Further, our ability to maximise access to affordable accommodation in the private sector is hampered by driving up demand in the area.

10 Equality analysis

- 10.1 Not applicable – The scrutiny report for information purposes only regarding the activity of another authority. Report is not recommending any decisions.

11 Environmental sustainability implications

- 11.1 Not applicable – The scrutiny report for information purposes only regarding the activity of another authority. Report is not recommending any decisions.

12 Appendices

There are none.

13 Background papers

There are none