

**Local geography, demography and associated maps of the pattern of service delivery across East Sussex & the City of Brighton & Hove.**

**Area Background Position Statement**

The County of East Sussex and the City of Brighton & Hove together have a population of 0.760m and cover an area of just over 1,800km<sup>2</sup>. The demography varies considerably, with the City area (pop. 0.250m) and the two other geographically separate conurbations of Eastbourne (pop. 0.092m) and Hastings (pop. 0.085m), along the South Coast, all having significant deprivation factors. The remainder of the County comprises small to medium towns dispersed across a rural hinterland. Within the whole of East Sussex, there are no motorways and less than fifty miles of dual carriageway. Consequently, the road infrastructure is poor, even the three geographically separate coastal conurbations have poor road connectivity yet contain 72% of the total population of the Authority's area. This affects directly any service economies of scale, which are particularly difficult to achieve in comparison to other Fire & Rescue Services. Maximising service resource effectiveness must be within the context of providing local standards of operational response which is commensurate with the local socio-demographic risks and relevant to the local populations.

The larger towns and the City of Brighton and Hove are popular tourist destinations, the City alone attracts eight million visitors each year, 6.5 million of these being day visitors. The City of Brighton & Hove also hosts a number of conferences including those held annually by major political parties, often centred around the Brighton Centre, Grand Hotel and Metropole Hotel. Such numbers of visitors however welcome to the economy, have to be supported in terms of fire and rescue service impacts.

Significant levels of deprivation are concentrated in the coastal towns (particularly in Hastings which has the highest proportion of deprived Super Output areas of any area in the South East). The County of East Sussex ranks as the most deprived in the South East and the City of Brighton & Hove ranks as the 2nd most deprived in terms of the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 overall score.

**Local Risks - Urban**

The area described above, provides the Fire Authority with the challenges associated with almost every aspect of community risk. The City of Brighton & Hove has significant areas suffering social deprivation, houses in multiple occupation, high rise buildings, large hotels, bed and breakfast accommodation, factory estates, narrow lanes, the historic Royal Pavilion and other cultural centres typifying a modern 24 hour city. The Universities of Sussex and Brighton are both located on the outskirts of Brighton and have around 32,000 students and provide around 7,000 graduates each year bringing additional pressures and risks associated with student accommodation.

A high proportion of the buildings in the seafront areas of Brighton & Hove, Eastbourne, Bexhill and Hastings are occupied by multiple households, which are often at greater risk of fire. Trend analysis and local knowledge has identified those people most at risk are; elderly people, particularly those over the age of 60, people living in socially deprived areas or on low incomes, significant numbers of students in university accommodation and residents of houses in multiple occupations.

According to the results from the 2001 census, Brighton & Hove has the highest percentage of overcrowded households outside London. The City also has more than 5 times the percentage of converted or shared accommodation than the rest of the South East and England & Wales average. It ranks eighth highest in England & Wales and the highest outside of London. One out of every 35 converted or shared dwellings in England and Wales is in the City of Brighton & Hove.

The risks identified above are being addressed through a combination of additional, and redirected internal resources and targeted through community safety initiatives. Partnership working, particularly in respect to Home Safety Visits, our input into the County's Local Area Agreement, our work with innovative Youth Intervention Scheme such as LIFE and the work of Arson Reduction Team in partnership with local Authorities and Sussex Police all help to address these issues.

#### **Local Risks - Rural**

On the coast the historic Cinque Port town of Rye, with its harbour is on the far eastern border of the County. Inland, the character of the County is mainly rural with extensive downlands, forests and heathland. East Sussex has many picturesque villages and the remote households which offer their own risks due to the distance from the community fire stations located in small towns like Crowborough, Uckfield, Lewes and Battle. Over half of the County is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Six of the 47 miles of coastline is designated as Heritage Coast. This has further impacts on the ability of the organisation to rationalise its service delivery due to the number of separated rural populations, and poor transport infrastructure. Also, contrary to common belief, the South East Region is not a uniformly prosperous region. Eastern East Sussex has been recognised as a specific area of rural deprivation and designated a Rural Development Areas with a 10 year programme of assistance.

There are additional significant risks associated with being a coastal Fire & Rescue Service. The Authority has, therefore, equipped itself with an effective and efficient response to meet the principal risks within its area and to respond to the range of incidents over and above those normally attended by the majority of other Fire & Rescue Services, including, a Maritime Team, as part of the national maritime incident response group (MIRG), a rope rescue team who respond to incidents alongside our colleagues in the Maritime Coastal Agency and an Animal Rescue Unit which provides mutual aid to our neighbouring Fire & Rescue Services.

### **Elderly age structure**

East Sussex has the highest proportion of very elderly residents of any county in England (by all three measures of over 75, over 85 and over 90 years old), with one-in-four residents being over pensionable age. 21% of the City of Brighton & Hove's residents are aged over 60, which is the national average, however, the percentage of the City's 85+ population, is above the national average, 2.6% compared with 1.95%. Elderly people have been identified as our main risk group with the majority of accidental fire deaths occurring in that age bracket. Therefore, a dedicated Home Safety Advisor Team has been employed to target this group in addition to the work of other community fire safety staff and operational crews. Work is targeted based on evidence gathered from partners and the Fire Service Emergency Cover toolkit.

### **Future population growth**

New government-published trend-based projections suggest that an average population increase of around 3,900 persons per year could be expected in East Sussex if current migration trends continued more or less unchanged for whole the period to 2028. Almost all of this change is projected to occur in the post-retirement age groups, with the very elderly aged 85+ projected to increase by nearly 80% over the 25-year period.

### **Future Housing Needs**

Since 1991, an average of around 2,240 new homes have been built each year across East Sussex and the City of Brighton & Hove. The Structure Plan sets out future development needs across the whole of East Sussex and the City of Brighton & Hove and requires another 14,100 homes to be developed in the next six years to 2011. The Structure Plan will be superseded in spring 2008 by the South East Plan, prepared by the South East England Regional Assembly, which proposes an additional 27,000 houses up to 2028 or 1,350 homes across the County. But as most of this is already committed, new land will only be needed for 3,500 houses, all within the Sussex Coast sub-region (Eastbourne, Hastings and the coastal parts of Lewes, Rother and Wealden). This will have a potential impact on the provision of response cover, particularly in areas currently covered by those stations with retained duty system personnel. Already some of our retained stations are busier than many daycrewed and shift stations elsewhere in the country and we predict a need to shift resources in the future.

### **House Prices**

House price rises to April 2005 averaged 11% for East Sussex, almost double the 6% of the previous year. By April 2005, the average price for a semi-detached house in the County had reached £198,600, and prices in all districts had risen by over £80,000 since 2001. Prices continue to remain well above the national average. With low average earnings locally, and despite interest rates remaining at historically low levels, many potential first-time buyers in East Sussex are simply being priced out of the market requiring them to move into the already congested rental market. This is the same story in the City of Brighton & Hove, which means that a fifth of households in the City rent from a private landlord. This is more than double the South East and England & Wales average.

The percentage of households in the Brighton & Hove private rented sector is the 6th highest in England & Wales, and the highest outside London. With the continuing increase in house prices, the local house price/earnings (affordability) ratio has also increased in the past year. Average house prices are now over eight times higher than annual average wages in East Sussex (compared to a national ratio of 5.6). Only 4 other county and unitary authority areas in England and Wales have a bigger affordability gap than East Sussex (Brighton & Hove being one of these).

The effect of the continuing increase in house prices has created a hidden 'at risk' group. A number of our elderly residents are asset rich in terms of owning a valuable property, but cash poor, leading to many of our 'at risk' community being concealed within affluent areas that would not normally be highlighted as high-risk.

#### Key Target Groups for the Fire Authority

Potentially, all members of the community are at risk from fire, however, national research supported by trend analysis and local knowledge has identified those people most at risk. The most vulnerable groups in the community are:

- Single parent families
- Single pensioners
- Those with limiting long-term illness
- Those living in rented accommodation

Consequently, our education and risk reduction strategies are focussed on identifying people in the above categories, and proactively offering appropriate means to help them reduce their level of risk.

As well as fires, our communities also face a significant risk of death or injury as a result of Road Traffic Collisions. As with the risk from fire, we are actively working with other agencies to try and prevent these collisions happening at all – and to minimise the effects if the collision does occur. As a final option, we are committed to maintaining an effective response capability, with well trained and equipped crews able to respond to life-threatening incidents within a suitable time.

**MAP OF PATTERN OF SERVICE DELIVERY ACROSS EAST SUSSEX**



