

# **Rough Sleeping Snapshot Estimates**

Forms and resources for local  
authorities



**Homeless Link**

# Rough Sleeping Snapshot Estimates Toolkit 2023

## Forms and resources for local authorities

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### Facilitator's notes for an estimate meeting

These notes are designed as a starting point and can be adapted for local use.

#### Welcome, introductions and apologies

- Chair gives a brief overview of the need to submit an estimate, including local context about practice to date in terms of snapshot estimates, and explains the 'typical night' chosen.
- Each attendee outlines their organisation's role in working with people sleeping rough and where their evidence derives from.
- Chair states who else has submitted data that will contribute to the overall estimate, if not present.
- If there will be discussion about individual clients, confirm the terms of confidentiality and go over the Data Sharing Protocol (either an existing protocol or the template provided).

#### Who to include in the estimate

Explain the Government definition of rough sleeping:

*People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or "bashes").*

Explain that the definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organised protest, squatters or Travellers.

Explain that the estimate is an evidence-based, snapshot assessment that forms part of a time series starting in 2010. It must only include those rough sleeping on that single night, rather than a larger sample of street activity or people using homelessness services – this point should be discussed as it is often misunderstood.

#### Estimated numbers and key hot spots

Chair to ask each representative to outline:

- Their estimated number of people sleeping rough on the typical night chosen, providing information to identify individuals which should include, where known: name, age, gender, nationality, rough sleeping location, evidence that an individual is sleeping rough and details of any other agencies working with that person. This can be given verbally.
- Where they think the rough sleeping hotspots are in the area.
- Whether they think there has been any change in the extent or nature of rough sleeping since last year.

- Other information sources and data that can be taken into account, such as an ongoing recording database for people sleeping rough, multi-agency groups/taskforces, information from agencies such as police or probation, hostel and shelter lists.

To arrive at a robust estimate, it is important to discuss identified individuals to remove any possibility of duplication (i.e. when individuals are identified by more than one agency) and get the most up to date information on their current circumstances and the evidence that they are sleeping rough at the moment.

The discussion needs to take into account disagreements between agencies about whether individuals were sleeping rough on the typical night (i.e. when people sleep rough intermittently), and issues such as whether to include individuals who say they are rough sleeping and would fall within the definition but have never been seen bedded down (e.g. because they are in garages, stairwells etc.). It may be necessary to source additional evidence following the meeting.

If appropriate, the Chair can lead the group to discuss whether other data gathering or coordination of support is required on an ongoing basis.

### Invitation template for an estimate meeting

[Date]

Dear colleague,

Since autumn 2010, all local authorities must submit an annual figure indicating the numbers of people sleeping rough in their area. They can do this by choosing to conduct a single source count-based estimate or multiple source estimate of the number of people rough sleeping on a typical night.

In 2010, the Government also widened the definition of rough sleeping and when estimating or counting it is essential that those included in the figure fall into the following definition:

*People sleeping, about to bed down (sitting on/in or standing next to their bedding) or actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments). People in buildings or other places not designed for habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or “bashes”).*

It is important that this single figure estimate is as robust as possible. To this end, we are bringing together key local agencies that will have the most accurate information about who is sleeping rough on a typical night. Your knowledge, expertise and intelligence will ensure a wider range of reliable information is assessed in order to arrive at the estimate.

For the purposes of the estimate, the typical night we are using is the night of [date] into the morning of [date].

We would like to invite you to the rough sleeping Estimate Meeting on *[date and location/virtual meeting link – date must be after the typical night]*.

Please come prepared with information about known people sleeping rough that you have contact with, including times and location – see the form below as a guide. If you are unable to send a representative, then please complete the following form prior to the date of the meeting and send via *[appropriate secure format e.g. password protected email]*.

If attending, bring this information with you on the day. This exchange of information is covered by *[the existing local Data Sharing Protocol / the attached Data Sharing Protocol - delete as required]*.

First name	Last name	DoB/Age under 18 / 18-25 / Over 25 / not known	Gender male / female / not known or not disclosed	Nationality UK national / non-UK national / not known	Rough sleeping location	Evidence the individual was rough sleeping on the agreed 'typical' night	Other agencies working with individual
<i>Jo</i>	<i>Smith</i>	<i>09/12/79</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>British</i>	<i>Central area of town – behind main carpark</i>	<i>Presented at project previous day and self-reported. Known not to have any accommodation.</i>	<i>Known to Community Safety Team</i>

Please add as many rows as required. If sending these by email, please password protect the document.

Many thanks for your involvement.

### Data sharing protocol for estimating rough sleeping

#### **Why are we estimating the number of people sleeping rough?**

All local authorities are required to submit an annual figure indicating the numbers of people sleeping rough in their area to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) This methodology enables us to collect information on which to base our estimate.

In order to reach a figure to inform the estimate of the number of people sleeping rough on a specified 'typical night' between 1 October and 30 November, invited participants will be asked to provide basic details of people who are known to be sleeping rough locally (verbally in a meeting or by email using a password encrypted file). The local authority will use this information to arrive at a single figure and to collate numbers of women, men, under-18s, young people, and UK- or non-UK nationals. The information will be discarded subsequently.

A data sharing protocol is required to ensure that information can be shared in a way that complies with data protection legislation. Local authorities and their partners are each responsible for ensuring their compliance with data protection legislation.

### **Purpose of this protocol**

This protocol template has been developed as part of the Rough Sleeping Snapshot Estimates Toolkit to support agencies to work with their local authority to come up with the most accurate estimate possible. Where a local protocol already exists, this should be used.

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### **Data sharing protocol**

This data sharing protocol has been agreed between the following Parties:

#### ***[names of participating agencies]***

with the aim of clarifying and formalising data sharing arrangements, to provide a framework for the Parties to share information to accurately estimate the numbers of people rough sleeping in ***[name of local authority]*** on a typical night.

Each organisation party to this agreement is the data controller for the information it holds. If one organisation shares personal data with another organisation, each remains the data controller for the information in their possession.

#### **Objectives**

The objectives of this protocol are to:

- a) Ensure that the rough sleeping estimate accurately reflects the numbers of people sleeping rough on the typical night chosen.
- b) Ensure that there is no double counting of the same individual and that rough sleeping is not over or under estimated in the local area.
- c) Ensure that the Parties are each clear about their data protection responsibilities.
- d) Promote trust between the Parties.
- e) Improve service delivery to individual service users by the Parties.

### Information

This protocol will apply to the exchange of information between the agencies listed above with the aim of providing an accurate single figure estimate of people sleeping rough on one night. The information to be shared is:

- Last name
- First Name
- Date of Birth / Age
- Gender
- Nationality
- Agency involved
- Evidence that an individual was rough sleeping in the local area on the agreed typical night

Name and date of birth are not considered to be sensitive personal data, but the fact that an individual is sleeping rough and the evidence of this fact is considered to be.

### Collection of information

As the data controllers, the organisations party to this agreement and involved in the estimation process are responsible for collecting personal information confidentially. It is up to them as data controllers to ensure procedures are in place to notify the data subjects that their information is being shared.

### Use of information

All services must take responsibility for ensuring that information, which is shared under the terms of this Protocol, will only be used for the agreed specific purpose: to provide a framework for the Parties to share information to accurately estimate the numbers of people rough sleeping and submit a single figure and aggregated demographic data to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) The information will be shared with the Local Authority and partners verbally in a meeting or by email using a password encrypted file. The local authority will use this information to arrive at a single figure and aggregated demographic data and discard the information subsequently.

Homeless Link will attend approximately ten percent of estimation meetings across England as an independent verifier. The Homeless Link representative will not note any personal data and will treat all discussions as confidential.

As personal data is not shared with MHCLG, the Ministry is not a data controller in this agreement.

### Information sharing without consent

Individual agencies will have consent procedures with regard to sharing client details that we expect them to adhere to. In some circumstances, information will need to be shared without the consent of the individual. This should be considered in exceptional circumstances only as per schedule three of the Data Protection Act.

Data quality

Information discovered to be inaccurate or inadequate for the purpose will be notified to the data controller. As all data controllers are responsible for the accuracy of the data they keep; it is therefore also the responsibility of the respective data controller to rectify the accuracy of the data they keep.

Anonymised information

The information can be generally shared for purposes as defined in this protocol but only when it has been anonymised or aggregated.

Agreement by parties

**Signed**..... **Dated**.....

**On behalf of** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signed**..... **Dated**.....

**On behalf of** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signed**..... **Dated**.....

**On behalf of** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signed**..... **Dated**.....

**On behalf of** \_\_\_\_\_



**Signed..... Dated.....**

**On behalf of \_\_\_\_\_**

**Signed..... Dated.....**

**On behalf of \_\_\_\_\_**



### Where to count – challenges to consider

#### Rural areas

It is logistically more difficult to carry out a count-based estimate in large rural areas than in urban areas. The area to cover is greater and there is a wide range of possible locations for people sleeping rough, from hillsides and woods to tents, caves and beach shelters. In rural areas there are more likely to be people sleeping rough on their own and they may be spread out over a large area. In such authorities, those carrying out the count cannot cover all possible sites and will have to concentrate on locations where people are most likely to be found sleeping rough, and on local knowledge. There also may be people sleeping rough on private property such as barns or on farmland that cannot be accessed without prior permission, and so are excluded from the count. Where resources make it difficult to carry out a count, local authorities should consider whether an evidence-based estimate will produce a more accurate figure. A spotlight count can be used as one of the intelligence sources, as long as it happens on the night chosen for the estimate.

#### Urban Areas

In cities and large towns, it is easier to carry out a single night count, as often people sleeping rough will be concentrated within a relatively small area and may congregate in groups for safety/community. However, there may be other challenges. Sleep sites may be hidden or inaccessible. There are safety issues involved in entering some possible locations for rough sleeping, such as derelict buildings and building sites – support may be needed from the Fire Service. There may be people out on the streets having left late night pubs and clubs, which can make it difficult to assess the number of people actually sleeping rough. It may therefore be appropriate for the count to start later – in the early hours of the morning.

#### Under-representation of particular groups

There has been historic concern that a number of groups risk being under-represented in rough sleeping figures.<sup>1</sup> This may include women, young people, and people who are LGBTQ+.<sup>2</sup> For example, women are often hidden homeless and under-counted in rough sleeping counts. Women are particularly vulnerable to assault and exploitation when sleeping rough and, as a result, tend to use more secluded or (perceived) secure locations to sleep when living on the streets.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, women may be more likely to sleep in the day to avoid the greater perceived risks of sleeping during the night.

Counters, for understandable safety reasons, are often not permitted to go into ‘risky’ areas (e.g. some dark alleyways or unlocked doorways), but these are the places in which the most vulnerable are likely to have concealed themselves. The involvement of

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<sup>1</sup> Communities and Local Government (2008) *Rough Sleeping 10 Years On: From the streets to independent living and opportunity* - Executive Summary, p4. Available at: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120919150326/http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/roughsleepingdiscussionresponse>

<sup>2</sup> <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/supporting-lgbtqi-people/>

<sup>3</sup> Jones, A. (1999) *Out of Sight, Out of Mind: The Experiences of Homeless Women* produced by Centre for Housing Policy (University of York) and Crisis.

police in street counts can be helpful in this situation, as long as any engagement is approached sensitively. An evidence-based estimate may be more likely to include under-represented groups, especially if specialist agencies are involved e.g. LGBTQ+ charities.

### Under-representation of people sleeping rough on public transport

Counts are likely to miss people sleeping rough using public transport as a place to sleep. Particularly in the winter and in metropolitan areas, a significant proportion of people are likely to take refuge on buses, trains, trams or tubes for warmth. Some services have formed partnerships with providers of public transport in order to carry out outreach work so that people sleeping rough can be identified and referred into services.

Care should be taken to establish if someone sleeping on public transport definitely fits the rough sleeping definition. There is a risk that people on buses or trains will be double counted as they move across local authority boundaries, unless comprehensive cross-boundary information sharing is in place. Due to these complications, people on public transport will usually fall outside the rough sleeping definition – if you plan to include people sleeping on public transport in your count, please discuss this with Homeless Link in advance.

### Squats

Squatters are excluded from the definition of rough sleeping. However, there have been cases where it is unclear whether a sleep site falls under the definition of a squat or under the definition of ‘buildings or other places not designed for human habitation’, which includes people in derelict buildings. If there is any doubt about whether a site is a squat, please speak to Homeless Link for further guidance on a case by case basis: [verifiers@homelesslink.org.uk](mailto:verifiers@homelesslink.org.uk). It is not safe to enter these sites during a count so, where a rough sleeping site of this nature is identified, Coordinators will need to follow an evidence-based estimate approach (with or without a spotlight count) to include these people. The Fire Service may be able to assist with safety interventions as part of ongoing support and engagement.

### Tents

People in campsites or other recreational settings, or sleeping in tents as part of an organised protest, do not fall within the definition of rough sleeping. However, a person sleeping in a tent elsewhere may meet the rough sleeping definition “actually bedded down in the open air (such as on the streets, in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters or encampments)”.

Coordinators should consider what access they need in order to count people sleeping tents and whether this can be achieved safely, particularly where the tents are on private land or in woodland.

Safeguarding is a concern in relation to tents, for example around child sexual exploitation and modern slavery/trafficking, where tents may be used as a base for sex work. There are also risks around drug use if people overdose while out of sight. The risk of Covid-19 infection may be increased by close proximity and lack of ventilation in tents. Local authorities, outreach teams and police should work together outside of the count night to establish what is happening where tents are pitched – due to the safety risks and level of engagement required, this work should not be attempted during the count night.

Counters – where possible those with experience of outreach or other support work – will need to establish how many people are in a tent by calling out. The tent itself cannot be assumed to contain one or more people. If access to areas where tents are pitched is not possible, or if there are concerns about any risks posed by calling out to people in tents, coordinators should use the evidence-based estimate process (including a spotlight count if appropriate).

### Charity sleep-outs

In some years, there have been charity sleep-out events taking place during the same period as the rough sleeping counts. While the sleep-out itself will fall outside the rough sleeping definition, there is the potential that this sort of event could disrupt local patterns of rough sleeping, meaning that it's no longer a typical night. Local authorities should check in with charity partners and look out for local promotion of sleep-out events, in order to avoid clashing dates. If there is an unavoidable clash, the count verifier will need additional information about the sleep-out (especially its location in relation to rough sleeping sites) before they can verify if it was still a typical night.

### **Cars, derelict boats and other places not designed for human habitation**

The definition of rough sleeping includes: "People in buildings or other places not designed for human habitation (such as stairwells, barns, sheds, car parks, cars, derelict boats, stations, or bashes)." A 'bash' or 'bender' is a makeshift shelter structure e.g. wood and tarpaulins, often found in woods or alongside canal towpaths. A count-based estimate might not be the best way to find people sleeping rough in these locations, for example if someone parks in different locations each night or if it isn't safe to access a derelict boat or a barn. coordinators should use local intelligence to decide whether an evidence-based estimate (including a spotlight count as appropriate) would be more accurate by including people in these locations. As with squats (see above), if coordinators have any questions about whether a site meets this part of the definition, please contact Homeless Link for clarification on a case-by-case basis: [verifiers@homelesslink.org.uk](mailto:verifiers@homelesslink.org.uk)

## Count risk assessments

Risk area	Actions to manage risk
COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinators confirm that staff and volunteers are free of symptoms on the day of the count, and have reserve teams to cover anyone who becomes unwell or needs to self-isolate</li> <li>• Counters are offered masks and hand sanitiser</li> <li>• The count base has sufficient space and ventilation</li> <li>• The coordinator follows any applicable government guidance so that staff and volunteers are <u>travelling safely</u> to/from count patches and when arranging transport home</li> <li>• Counting teams are no more than 2-3 people to enable social distancing</li> <li>• There are handwashing facilities at the count base</li> </ul>
Travel to and from the base of operations at unsocial hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Count coordinator books and pays for taxis in advance to/from the base of operations, as needed</li> <li>• Count coordinator checks that everyone due to take part signs in and out of both the initial meeting and debriefing sessions</li> <li>• Count coordinator ensures that times of access to the base of operations are clearly communicated and that verifier/counters are not waiting outside for the building to open</li> </ul>
Counters working at night in dispersed and isolated areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Count coordinator ensures that the Health &amp; Safety checklist is read and understood by each counter</li> <li>• Counters work in pairs and remain with their count partner at all times</li> <li>• Where possible, a counter with local knowledge and/or experience providing support is included in each pair.</li> <li>• Each pair of counters has a mobile phone (charged and with credit) with essential contact numbers e.g. for the base of operations</li> <li>• Count coordinator issues additional mobile phones as necessary at the start of the count</li> <li>• Count coordinator has a contact mobile phone number for each pair of counters</li> <li>• Counters have a map with their counting area clearly marked</li> <li>• Times are agreed at the start of the count for counters will be back at the base of operations. If anyone fails to return, the Count coordinator contacts police to locate them</li> <li>• The Count coordinator may also agree telephone check-ins during the count - these should be initiated by counters to avoid noise nuisance when the team is near people who are sleeping</li> </ul>

Risk area	Actions to manage risk
Counters entering dark, unknown or high risk areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Count coordinator gathers local intelligence prior to the count, including from police, and gives clear instructions about any high risk areas to be avoided, and marks them on the maps</li> <li>• Counters are issued with torches / visibility clothing / panic alarms</li> <li>• Counters are responsible for assessing risk and ensuring their safety during the count – counters should not go into any area that they feel is unsafe and should never be alone</li> <li>• Counters check mobile phone reception periodically and move quickly out of areas where the signal is poor</li> <li>• The count coordinator makes pre-arrangements to access hard-to-reach areas (e.g. work with park wardens, private security or car park teams, procures keys to stairwells, or police lead on access to particular sites)</li> </ul>
Counters find unknown people sleeping rough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counters instructed never to shine a torch in anyone’s face</li> <li>• The count coordinator gives guidance on whether to wake people – usually only experienced staff</li> <li>• Counters assess risk before and during each interaction and move away if they feel unsafe</li> <li>• Counters carry information cards/leaflets to leave with people, so they know where to seek help next day</li> </ul>
Counters find themselves or others in a situation of immediate concern/risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counting teams agree a code word to let colleagues know if they feel uncomfortable or at risk in a situation</li> <li>• If possible, move away from the incident and find a safe location from which to call</li> <li>• Call the police for assistance</li> <li>• Once in a safe location, call to report the incident to the count coordinator</li> <li>• Coordinator debriefs with the counters on their return and follows up with a call a few days later</li> </ul>
Concerns about the health of someone on the streets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call an ambulance. Counters can do this as a concerned member of the public and do not have to approach the person unless they feel confident and safe to do so</li> </ul>

Risk area	Actions to manage risk
A person sleeping rough is under 18 years old	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call the count coordinator for advice on contacting out of hours Social Services and/or Police to safeguard the child, and remain with/near the child until support arrives</li> </ul>
Counters being challenged about their activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The count coordinator issues an ID letter explaining the count</li> <li>• Counters carry ID at all times</li> <li>• Police (and, where appropriate, private security companies or other partners) are told that the count is taking place</li> </ul>
Counters waking people in the open / in tents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If an individual is not known, where it is safe to do so and the counter is experienced in outreach/support work, they should attempt to wake each individual to ask their details and connect them with support</li> <li>• Counters should not stand over people as they attempt to wake them</li> <li>• Counters should not touch people who are sleeping to wake them – politely speak or call to them.</li> <li>• Counters should stand several paces back, with a second counter further back</li> <li>• Counters should not open tents, instead call out and then ask each person in the tent to respond</li> <li>• It may be helpful to request the assistance of the local police in waking individuals who counters are unable to wake</li> </ul>



### Health and safety checklist for counters

#### DO

- ✓ Ensure you have signed in and given your telephone number to staff at the base of operations
- ✓ Ensure that you have your work ID with you if available, and an ID letter about the count given to you. You should produce this if you are stopped, e.g. by police or security guards while conducting the count
- ✓ Ensure you have the telephone number of the base of operations and/or the count coordinator
- ✓ Ensure you have a fully charged mobile phone, with enough credit to make calls
- ✓ Ask any questions, if you are unsure about anything, before you go out
- ✓ Be aware of your safety, and the safety of others, at all times during the count
- ✓ Check your phone signal regularly, do not stay long in areas with no signal
- ✓ Agree a code word with your team to let them know if you feel uncomfortable or at risk
- ✓ Be aware that you may come across illicit activity such as drug-taking or drug dealing and that other people may not welcome your presence – remain calm and alert to risks
- ✓ Contact the Police if you come across any sort of trouble, for you, your team or others
- ✓ Call an ambulance if you think someone sleeping rough is seriously unwell. You can do this as a concerned member of the public. You do not have to approach the person if you do not feel confident to do so
- ✓ Call the coordinator to request social services and/or police support if a child (under 18) is sleeping rough and stay with/near them until help arrives
- ✓ Keep in regular contact with the coordinator at the count-base and follow the briefing instructions
- ✓ Inform the coordinator at the count-base immediately of any incidents, and of any delays
- ✓ At the end of the count report back to count-base, sign in with the coordinator, and return all forms, phones, maps and equipment
- ✓ Confirm with the count coordinator that you have transport home or require a cab
- ✓ Sign out with the count coordinator before leaving the building

DON'T

- X Attend the count if you have any symptoms of Covid-19
- X Split up from your team/partner whilst conducting the count
- X Approach anyone who is displaying aggressive or violent behaviour
- X Shine your torch in anyone's face or wake people using physical contact
- X Go into derelict buildings/squats/building sites if no prior planning has taken place to get support from the police or other agency
- X Go into any areas (dark alleys, underground car parks, parks etc.) where you or your fellow volunteers do not feel safe. Note down the areas you do not enter, if you suspect it may be a site for rough sleeping
- X Stand over or touch anyone as you wake them
- X Open tents
- X Use alcohol or an illegal substance prior to undertaking a count
- X Go home from the count without speaking to the count coordinator and verifier

**Your safety is paramount**  
**Do not put yourself or any member of your team at risk**

## What We Do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

## Homeless Link

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**Let's End Homelessness  
Together**

