

Rough Sleeping Snapshot Estimates Toolkit

Guide to intelligence gathering



Homeless Link

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Guidance on Intelligence gathering

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Introduction

Since the autumn of 2010, all local authorities have been required to submit an annual snapshot figure to MHCLG to indicate the number of people sleeping rough in their area on a typical night between 1st October and 30th November. They can arrive at this snapshot by using one of three approaches:

1. Count-based estimate with a full physical count of visible rough sleeping.
2. Evidence-based estimate meeting using evidence from different partner agencies, which may include people in hidden rough sleeping sites.
3. Evidence-based estimate, including a spotlight count using evidence from different partner agencies. This includes a physical count of areas with visible rough sleeping alongside evidence for other locations (discussed during an estimate meeting), which may include people in hidden rough sleeping sites.

All of the above approaches record only those people seen, or thought to be, sleeping rough on a single 'typical' night. They do not include everyone in an area with a history of sleeping rough, or everyone sleeping rough in areas across the October-November period.

The annual rough sleeping snapshot allows local authorities to track progress, consider whether current measures are effective in tackling rough sleeping, and if new approaches are needed. MHCLG produces a statistical release based on the data each year.¹

Consulting with local agencies

Local partner agencies should be consulted to discuss what intelligence they have about rough sleeping locally to check if there are any factors that might affect the choice of a 'typical' night for the estimate.

The local authority should involve those local agencies that will have the most accurate information about who is sleeping rough.

Local partner agencies could include:

- Outreach teams
- Advice agencies
- Hostels, day centres, night shelters
- Housing department
- Social Services, Youth Workers, Probation
- Police, community safety teams
- Health and mental health services
- Housing Associations
- Park rangers
- Faith groups, soup runs, street pastors

¹ www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics#rough-sleeping

- Refuse collectors, town centre/local retail security/managements, street wardens.

How to consult

The local authority should arrange a meeting and invite local partners to contribute to the intelligence gathering process. If there is a local forum or network that brings together key homelessness agencies, such as a Rough Sleeping Action Group, this could be the starting point for consultation.

The multi-agency meeting should bring together the most accurate and up-to-date information on rough sleeping in order to make a decision on which approach to use.

In areas of very low numbers of people sleeping rough or where the local authority covers a large rural area, and where there is no existing multi-agency forum, the local authority may decide to carry out the consultation by telephone or email. In this case, the local authority should check with Homeless Link that this would meet verification requirements. Homeless Link must still be contacted to arrange verification.

See the template agenda, notes and information gathering form below to initiate the planning process for your snapshot estimate. Please note that a separate estimate meeting should be arranged after your chosen 'typical' night with partner agencies, to discuss intelligence and to arrive at a final snapshot figure, including demographic data. Please refer to the [Rough Sleeping Estimates Toolkit 2024](#) for guidance on how to carry out your chosen approach.

Agenda and notes for an intelligence-gathering meeting

Welcome, introductions and apologies

- The Chair should open the meeting with a brief overview of the need to submit a snapshot figure and include local context about practice to date in terms of count-based estimates, evidence-based estimates, and evidence base estimates including a spotlight count.
- Ask each attendee to outline the role of their organisation in working with people sleeping rough and where their intelligence derives from.
- Chair to state who else has submitted data that will contribute to the overall estimate, if these parties are not in attendance.
- Agree the process and protocol for sharing sensitive information about clients. A template data protection protocol is provided in the 'Forms and Resources for Local Authorities' in the Rough Sleeping Estimates Toolkit 2024.

Who to include in the snapshot estimate

- Explain the definition of rough sleeping and who this includes
- In 2010, the Government widened the definition of rough sleeping and when estimating or counting it is essential that those included in the count 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”).

- Explain that the rough sleeping definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, individuals who are sofa-surfing, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes, organised protests, squatters, or Travellers.
- Discuss with the group that the snapshot estimate must only include those rough sleeping on the chosen ‘typical’ night, rather than a larger sample of street activity or people using homelessness services.
- Discuss any issues that arise around what constitutes sufficient evidence to include people who say they are rough sleeping but have never been seen doing so.
- Note that local authorities are also required to return demographic data on the number of women, men, under-18s, 18 -25s, over 25s, and UK and non-UK nationals

Key hot spots and estimated numbers

Chair to ask each representative from the partner agencies to outline:

- Where they think the rough sleeping hotspots are in the local authority area.
- Their estimated number of people sleeping rough.
- 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 ongoing recording in a database for people sleeping rough, task and targeting groups, information from agencies such as police or probation, hostel and shelter lists.

The discussion then needs to take into account disagreements between agencies and to address issues of double counting (to include information on individuals, if appropriate data protection processes are in place).

Local authorities may agree to collate further information following this meeting or take additional steps to avoid double estimation between agencies.

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

Deciding the approach

Reasons to choose an **evidence-based estimate** approach:

- Sleep sites are inaccessible e.g. in woods or dispersed across rural areas.
- Sleep sites are, during the night, unsafe to access or are hidden from sight.

- The local authority cannot arrange safe access to known rough sleeping sites (e.g. parks, tower blocks) during a street count.
- There is regular intelligence gathering in place by a number of agencies and they are happy to share their intelligence with the local authority.
- Numbers of people sleeping rough are consistently low, they are already in touch with services, and partner agencies agree this is the case (i.e. there are rarely people who are new or returning to the streets).
- The local authority can gather sufficient and reliable intelligence on people sleeping rough on the typical night via partner agencies.
- Partner agencies agree to collect information for an agreed night and to share this with the local authority for the purpose of the estimate.

Reasons to choose an **evidence-based estimate, including a spotlight count** approach:

- There is a mix of visible/accessible and hidden/inaccessible locations in the local authority area.
- The individuals sleeping rough or overall numbers of people sleeping rough in visible/accessible sites change frequently.
- There are conflicting views from partner agencies about which method is right for the area.
- Additional robust intelligence comes to light on the night of a planned street count about hidden rough sleeping (i.e. the process is expanded from count-based estimate to evidence based estimate meeting).

Reasons to choose a **count-based estimate** approach:

- People sleeping rough are in sleep sites that will be visible/accessible at night.
- There are changes in the number, population or location of people sleeping rough where sites are visible (e.g. areas near transport hubs where transient groups sleeping rough make the figures unpredictable from one night to the next; areas that regularly see people new to the streets).
- There are difficulties forming an evidence-based estimate on the basis of the information available (e.g. lack of partners who have intelligence about where people are sleeping rough, or partner agencies refuse to share data).
- There is significant disagreement about the numbers between agencies and sites are visible/accessible.

The local authority should use the approach that will most accurately reflect the number of people sleeping rough in their area and will provide the most robust estimate.

Action: Local authority to decide which approach they will follow and agree the date of the 'typical' night. Partner agencies to understand the rough sleeping definition and what evidence is required.

Invite template for an intelligence-gathering meeting

From autumn 2010, all local authorities are required to submit an annual figure to MHCLG indicating the numbers of people sleeping rough in their area. They can do this by choosing to conduct a count-based estimate, evidence-based estimate meeting or an evidence-based estimate meeting including a spotlight count of the number of people rough sleeping on a chosen typical night.

In 2010, the Government 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 snapshot figure 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. Your knowledge, expertise and intelligence will ensure a wider range of reliable information on which to base the rough sleeping estimate.

We would like to invite you to the rough sleeping consultation meeting on [date and online meeting details].

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.

| | |
|---|--|
| Organisation name: | |
| Key hotspots for people sleeping rough in the area | |
| Estimated number of current confirmed people sleeping rough with which the organisation has contact with. Please provide details of individuals to eliminate double counting. | |
| Whether there have been any changes to the extent or nature of rough sleeping in the last year | |

| | |
|---|--|
| Information sources you hold about the nature or extent of people sleeping rough in the area | |
| Any factors that would change the typical level of people sleeping rough on a particular night (i.e. recent or pending events or factors specific to particular days of the week) | |

Many thanks for your involvement

Ongoing monitoring of rough sleeping

Introduction

MHCLG currently collects monthly management information about the support provided for people sleeping rough and those at risk of sleeping rough from all local authorities across England. This data is collected on DELTA via the Rough Sleeping Monthly Survey; in addition, the Rough Sleeping Data Framework was launched across all local authorities in England in May 2023. It includes monthly rough sleeping snapshot estimates for all local authority areas. This information gives a fuller picture of the dynamic and seasonal nature of rough sleeping, and illustrates the work done by local authorities to provide a pathway off the streets and into long-term accommodation. The data are not subject to the same verification and certification processes that are part of the annual autumn rough sleeping snapshot estimates.

The annual rough sleeping estimate is also a snapshot of the number of people sleeping rough in an area; however, this data is subject to a verification and certification process. The annual snapshot estimate presents an opportunity for local authorities to look at ongoing ways to collate and hold data to assist those on the streets to exit homelessness. Data about the extent of rough sleeping and the needs and journeys of individuals can help local authorities to ensure that the right services are available. It will allow them to use the experiences of those who are rough sleeping to ensure that measures are in place to tackle and prevent further rough sleeping.

Ways that information about people sleeping rough can be collected

A street needs audit: Some local authority areas have carried out street needs audits. This process is different to the annual snapshot, as more detailed information is sought about individuals' needs and issues as well as their use of services and the reason for their homelessness.

The European Ending Street Homelessness campaign, led by World Habitat, adopts a more detailed street needs audit approach. Known as 'Connections Weeks', these involve large numbers of volunteers looking to meet with everyone who is homeless in

a local area and, where possible, completing detailed assessments of their support needs. This data is used to inform community action and make recommendations to local authorities and other decision-makers.

While this approach is an exciting development in local movements to end homelessness, it should not be combined with the annual rough sleeping estimates.

The European Ending Street Homelessness approach has a far wider remit – for example, identifying people who are hidden homeless – which is not compatible with the narrower methodology required for Government statistics. The increased street activity by volunteers during a Connections Week means that any given night will not be typical. However, areas that are using this approach should be in a stronger position to arrive at their single figure and demographic data, as they will have already established multi-agency partnerships and increased their awareness of who is sleeping rough locally.

For more on the European Ending Street Homelessness campaign and toolkit, see:

<https://world-habitat.org/our-programmes/homelessness/>

Health needs audit tool: This audit tool enables homelessness agencies to evidence the health needs of their clients to better inform commissioning of future services. It increases the understanding amongst local strategic commissioners of the health needs of homeless people, including people sleeping rough and those in hostels. The audit involves gathering information about health and usage of services directly from clients using an online survey tool. The data can then be used to develop more responsive services to better meet the needs of homeless people.

If you are interested in using the tool, more information can be found here:

<https://homeless.org.uk/what-we-do/research/health-needs-audit/>

Multi-agency meetings or Rough Sleeping Action / Task and Targeting groups:

These groups can gather intelligence and coordinate responses to rough sleeping in a local authority area by bringing together local agencies from homelessness and other sectors. Regular meetings allow ongoing analysis of who is sleeping rough, what services are being used, and hotspots to focus on.

Meetings develop individual case management (i.e. personalised responses), sharing local issues like antisocial behaviour and community safety, and/or a strategic focus through monitoring trends to inform commissioning and planning. Local multi-agency groups can facilitate reconnection or sideways moves between accommodation services. These meetings can hold agencies to account and ensure people sleeping rough receive a coordinated response that is appropriate to their needs.

Intelligence gathering from Community Safety or Street Teams: Because of the 24-hour nature of Community Safety and Safer Neighbourhood Teams, as well as those focusing on street cleaning or traffic/parking, local areas can arrange for regular updates from these teams to inform the planning of outreach services. This is of particular value in areas that do not have daily street outreach services and a large area to cover.

Analysing local data: Gathering information about people from service provider databases gives rich data for analysis about the people sleeping rough and homeless people in contact with services on an ongoing basis. Making sure that the systems recording information are as compatible as possible locally and share common variables about clients can help with data collection and analysis of trends in needs and outcomes, which informs service planning. Homeless Link has created resources that support homelessness service to collect, understand and use their data. For further guidance see: <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/measuring-your-impact/>

You can find out more about GDPR in [this webinar series](#)

In some areas, common multi-agency client recording systems like the CHAIN database in London have been developed.

CHAIN is a database used by over 80 projects (outreach teams, day centres, hostels and resettlement teams) to record all contacts and work with people sleeping rough and the street population. Reports based on information held in CHAIN help decision-makers to monitor the needs of people sleeping rough in London and develop strategies and services. The system also helps service provider staff share information to ensure that they act as quickly and effectively as possible to help clients.

Although CHAIN data is about people sleeping rough in London, it provides a useful analysis of trends in numbers and needs that local authorities and services in other areas can compare with.

To find out more about CHAIN see: <https://homeless.org.uk/what-we-do/streetlink-and-chain/chain/>

Hostel demand and occupancy: The ongoing monitoring of data and regular meetings of hostel providers can be used to collate data about people who are sleeping rough by looking at the demand (including unmet need if people are unable or unwilling to be accommodated), the level of referrals, vacancies and trends.

Although it is at the local authority's discretion, it may be useful to collect information on occupancy of hostels and night shelters potentially available to people sleeping rough during the period of the count. The purpose of this is to assess:

- The number of people with a history of rough sleeping in the area who are staying in hostels.
- The extent to which existing hostels are providing or could provide for people sleeping rough, or whether different or additional provision might be needed. The initial focus is on 'direct access' hostels rather than on all hostels and supported accommodation in the area, as these will be the ones which people sleeping rough may be able to access from the streets.

The term 'direct access' does not necessarily refer to projects that accept self-referrals. The suggested definition of a 'direct access' hostel is:

- for 'single'/non-statutory homeless people, especially people sleeping rough and those with nowhere else to stay.
- intended to be short stay or emergency accommodation.
- has frequent vacancies, on at least a weekly basis.
- does not operate a waiting list.
- 24-hour staff cover.

If there are hostels in the local area which are not 'direct access' but to which street outreach workers have referral rights, then these should also be included.

Contact hostels by telephone on the day of the count and the day after for information on occupancy on that night, as this is the most important figure to record. It may also be helpful, in assessing appropriate provision, to have an analysis of hostel provision and occupancy for a longer period around the time of the count.

Other information on hostel provision includes criteria relating to age, gender, support needs (including alcohol, drug and mental health problems), access times, referral arrangements and any additional services such as wet provision, detoxification, medical and support services. This enables an assessment to be made of whether the current provision is meeting, or could potentially meet, the needs of people sleeping rough in the area.

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**

