

# **Rough Sleeping Snapshot Estimates 2025**

**Briefing for street count teams and  
volunteers**



**Homeless Link**

# Rough Sleeping Snapshot Estimates 2025

## Briefing for street count teams and volunteers

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## Health & 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 are unwell
- 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

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

## Notes for counters

### Introduction

This document is for people participating in a rough sleeping count. Everyone taking part should read it.

Each year local authorities carry out a snapshot estimate in order to arrive at a single figure for the number of people sleeping rough on a single 'typical' night, as well as basic demographics on gender, age and nationality. This data is submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to help inform the national picture of rough sleeping, and they produce a statistical release based on the data each year.

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, via the Ending Rough Sleeping Data Framework on DELTA. This includes monthly rough sleeping snapshot estimates for all Local Authority areas. While the data is published by MHCLG, usually on a quarterly basis, they are not subject to the same verification and certification processes that are part of the annual snapshot estimates.

The snapshot methodology aims to get as accurate a representation of the number of people sleeping rough as possible, while acknowledging that each approach has its limitations. A snapshot records only those people seen, or thought to be, sleeping rough on a single 'typical' night. It does not include everyone in an area with a history

of sleeping rough, or everyone sleeping rough in areas across the October-November period.

The local authority chooses the approach that best meets its local context. The approach depends on local agencies having, and sharing, intelligence about who is sleeping rough and where:

- A **count-based estimate** is the number of people seen sleeping rough in the local authority area on a 'typical night' – a single date chosen by the local authority between 1<sup>st</sup> October and 30<sup>th</sup> November. It is a snapshot and will not record everyone in the area with a history of rough sleeping over the two months.
- An **evidence-based estimate** is an evidence-based assessment by partners, leading to a single snapshot figure that represents the number of people thought to be sleeping rough in the local authority area on a 'typical night' – a single date chosen by the local authority between 1st October and 30th November. Again, it is a snapshot and will not include everyone in the area with a history of rough sleeping over the two months.
- An **evidence-based estimate including a spotlight count** is a combination of the two approaches above. One of the evidence sources is a street count, which may or may not be as extensive as the count-based estimate. All spotlight counts must take place after midnight (taking into account the night-time economy of the area).

### The definition of rough sleeping

For the purpose of the estimates, people sleeping rough are defined as:

*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").*

A bash, or bender, is a makeshift shelter structure, often made from tarpaulin or wood.

It is important that partner agencies taking part understand the definition of rough sleeping and do not include people in hostels or shelters, individuals who are sofa-surfing, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes or organised protest, squatters or Travellers.

It does not include people who were rough sleeping in the area on a previous night or earlier in the evening but who were not there at the time of the count. It does not include people wandering around or empty sleeping sites.

'Bedded down' is taken to mean either lying down or sleeping. 'About to bed down' includes those who are sitting in/on or standing next to a sleeping bag or other bedding. The intention is to establish that they are or will be rough sleeping on the

night of the count. Experience shows that, in many areas, people seen drinking in the street or begging (even if they have a blanket or a sleeping bag) are not necessarily sleeping rough and they should not be included unless they are clearly bedded down or about to bed down at the time of the count.

All those who fall into this definition should be counted, regardless of nationality or eligibility for public funds, or whether they are known to have accommodation/a tenancy available to them.

### Who takes part in the count?

The local authority is responsible for the whole process of estimating the number of people rough sleeping.

The local authority can delegate the detailed management of the process to a **Count Coordinator**. They are the main contact for counting teams, with responsibility for ensuring that counters are fully briefed and equipped for the count and that a consistent approach is taken to arrive at the single figure.

Other local agencies who work with people sleeping rough will have an active role in planning and carrying out the count, such as defining the geographic areas of the count and providing volunteer counters.

In some areas, team coordinators will each be responsible for a defined geographic area of the count and for supervising counters in that segment on the night of the count.

You, the **counters**, will work together in pairs or small groups to check locations in a defined segment and systematically make a record of each person found sleeping rough on that night.

Please note that, from 2025 onwards, the Homeless Link designated Quality Assurance Verifier will no longer attend count-based estimates on the night. In line with evidence-based estimates (with or without a spotlight count) Quality Assurance for count-based estimates will now be carried out remotely, unless otherwise indicated by Homeless Link. The Count Coordinator may ask you to have a brief conversation in the days following the count (by phone or online) with the designated Homeless Link Quality Assurance Verifier, about how you thought the count went.

### Carrying out the count

#### Start and finish times

Start times should be tailored to meet local circumstances. The earliest permitted start time is midnight. It is highly recommended that in cities and towns counts start at 2am so that people who bed down later in busier areas are still counted. Counts are normally completed by 5am but may be conducted after dawn in rural areas where the majority of people are sleeping rough away from built-up and well-lit areas. In most cases, if appropriate intelligence has been gathered and enough volunteers recruited, counts take around 2 to 3 hours. It's advisable to eat before starting your count and take water and a snack with you, as you could be walking for several hours.

### **The area where you will carry out the count**

It is not necessary to cover every street or park in a local authority area. With the limited resources available, the Count Coordinator will focus efforts on areas that people are known to use while sleeping rough, and other potential sleep sites. These areas are identified through prior local intelligence gathering.

Count Coordinators will divide the area into segments and produce maps with boundaries clearly marked to show the areas to be covered by separate teams of counters. Wherever possible, the areas covered should be well known to counters. If you are unclear about the exact area you are covering, make sure you raise this with the coordinator before leaving the base of operations.

### **Briefing and debriefing**

All counters should attend an initial meeting and debriefing at a count-base in a safe venue, such as a local authority building or day centre. The Coordinator will explain the purpose of the count and how the process will work.

You will be given a map showing individual streets and parts of streets that you will be covering. You will also be provided with an identification letter describing what you are doing. The Count Coordinator will have gathered intelligence ahead of the count to identify sites where people might sleep rough. This could include private land such as hospital or college grounds. The Count Coordinator will confirm if access to these areas has been arranged. Areas that are not readily accessible on the night of the count, whether public or private, should not be counted. Make a note of any area that could not be checked.

### **Safety considerations**

Local authorities have a responsibility to ensure that those involved in a rough sleeping count are safe at all times. They should balance the need to keep people safe with the need to gather as much accurate information about people sleeping rough as possible.

Counters are responsible for reading and following the Health & Safety Checklist, which forms part of this toolkit.

Arrangements will be made in advance by the Count Coordinator for your safe transport home, by taxi if necessary. Depending on the location of the count base and how late the count starts, the organisers may need to provide safe transportation to the venue as well.

### **Interventions on the night**

Local authorities should make prior arrangements so that an emergency response is available for people found on the count who want to move away from rough sleeping. This could be emergency beds or an assessment hub. Where immediate provision is not available, people sleeping rough should be given information about local services in order to access support at the next available opportunity.

### Recording the data

- On the night of the count, counters should record people rough sleeping on the Rough Sleeping Count Form (or a locally produced equivalent). Copies of this form will be provided on the night or can be downloaded from the Rough Sleeping Snapshot Estimates Toolkit 2025 on the [Homeless Link Knowledge Hub](#)
- Counters should record each individual person on a separate line on the form rather than simply write totals on the form, as this can't be verified as an accurate record. Alongside the single figure of people sleeping rough, basic demographic data on gender, age and nationality will be aggregated and sent to MHCLG. Individual data are not shared.
- The single figure and demographic data are submitted to MHCLG using the DELTA online system. It is the responsibility of the Local Authority to submit their data by Friday 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2025.
- Information about each person sleeping rough may be recorded from previous knowledge of the person and their sleeping site.
- If an individual is not known, and where it is safe to do so, the counter should attempt to wake each individual to record their details. Even if the counter cannot observe, or establish, any details about the individual (for example because they are unable to wake them and they are covered up) they should still record them individually. It may be helpful to request the assistance of the local police in waking individuals who counters are unable to wake safely, bearing in mind that people might not appreciate being disturbed.
- Establishing the identity of a person sleeping rough on the night of the count will help with follow-up and referrals. However, note the data protection rules below.
- If people sleeping rough are supported with any intervention on the night of the count (including referral to assessment hubs, self-isolating accommodation, use of the emergency services or referral to cold weather or other emergency provision) they should still be counted as bedded down at the point the count was undertaken and recorded within the single figure.
- As Counters are likely to come across people who do not speak English as their first language, a language ID chart for people to point at their preferred language. Copies should be provided for all counters: [www.esht.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Language-identification-chart.pdf](http://www.esht.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Language-identification-chart.pdf)
- Details about individuals should be kept strictly confidential and not revealed to anyone outside of the count. It is important to give as much information as possible on the location of people sleeping rough to help with planning support and services in future
- Rough Sleeping Count Forms must be completed on the night of the count and handed to the Count Coordinator on arrival back to the count-base



### **Data sharing**

As part of the count, it must be made clear to individuals that they are providing their personal details (name, date of birth) voluntarily, and are not obliged to provide them. If a person refuses to give their personal information, they will still be recorded as sleeping rough, and demographic information can be recorded where known.

The Count Coordinator should provide you with copies of a data protection statement on the night of the count, in case it is requested or to assist you to answer any questions.

### **Checking the results**

A debriefing meeting will be held on your return from the count. Counters should return all forms to the Count Coordinator, including those with a nil count, and agree the total counted for their individual count team. The debriefing meeting will check that all areas were covered and that there was no double counting. It is also an opportunity to add any further information about individuals seen bedded down who are known to other workers.

If you have any concerns about how the count was conducted, or how decisions were made to include or exclude individuals, please speak to the Homeless Link Rough Sleeping Snapshot Estimates Project Coordinator at the earliest opportunity following the count: [verifiers@homelesslink.org.uk](mailto:verifiers@homelesslink.org.uk)

### **Avoiding publicity**

Please keep information about the time and date of the count confidential. Publicity can worry some people sleeping rough and they may avoid their usual areas on the night if they know a count is taking place.

## 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.

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@HomelessLink

# Let's End Homelessness Together

