



Counts & Estimates Toolkit 2018

Introduction & intelligence gathering

Let's end homelessness together

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Contents

Introduction	3
Submitting the single figure	3
Collecting demographic data	3
The Rough Sleeping Initiative	4
Deciding how to evaluate the extent of rough sleeping	4
Consulting with local agencies	5
Template agenda for an intelligence gathering meeting	6
Template invite for an intelligence gathering meeting	8
Ongoing monitoring of rough sleeping	9

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Full toolkit available at:

www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/counts-and-estimates-evaluating-extent-of-rough-sleeping

Introduction

Since autumn 2010, all local authorities have been required to submit an annual figure to MHCLG to indicate the number of people sleeping rough in their area on a typical night. They can arrive at this figure by means of an evidence-based estimate, a count of visible rough sleeping, or an estimate including a spotlight count. This annual rough sleeping figure 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.

Homeless Link's role is to:

- Publish a toolkit that supports local authorities to produce the most accurate figure, whether by count, estimate or estimate including a spotlight count
- Provide support to local authorities in planning and carrying out the data collection
- Verify/validate each rough sleeping count and estimate
- Provide training and support to verifiers
- Collate numbers of young people, men, women and migrants sleeping rough and share this with MHCLG

Local authorities should appoint a lead person to oversee the process and liaise with Homeless Link's Counts & Estimates Project Manager for support and to arrange verification: verifiers@homelesslink.org.uk

Submitting the single figure

The count or estimate takes place between 1st October and 30th November.

Local authorities should submit the single figure and demographic data using the MHCLG's DELTA online system. See the DELTA guidance for further information:

www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/counts-and-estimates-evaluating-extent-of-rough-sleeping

Data must be submitted to MHCLG by the local authority using the DELTA online system by 14th December.

Collecting demographic data

Since 2015, the counts and estimates statistics have included additional demographic data on the numbers of women, men, under-18s, under-25s, and British, EU and non-EU nationals represented among people sleeping rough. It is the responsibility of local authorities to submit aggregate data to MHCLG on the DELTA online system, alongside their single figure. MHCLG will publish the data.

Where demographic information is not known (for example, because someone has not shared their personal details with agencies) this will also be noted for each category. The demographic data is collected as an indication of the representation of particular groups among people who are sleeping rough.

The Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI)

The Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) is a targeted fund for local authorities with high numbers of people sleeping rough. Local areas who received RSI funding this year are required to submit monthly reports (including detail about their rough sleeping population) and conduct a rough sleeping street count in September, January and March. The RSI rough sleeping figures are not official statistics and are not independently verified by Homeless Link.

RSI areas should submit their annual snapshot figure and demographic data for the official rough sleeping statistics using the method that will most accurately reflect the number of people sleeping rough in their area.

Deciding how to evaluate the extent of rough sleeping

There is currently no national mechanism for recording every person who sleeps rough in England. The snapshot methodology aims to get as accurate a representation of the number of people sleeping rough as possible, while acknowledging that each process has its limitations. The evaluation method is chosen to meet the local context: counts are based on visible rough sleeping, and evidence-based estimates on a range of sources for rough sleeping.

The **estimate** is an evidence-based assessment by partners, leading to a single 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 1 October and 30 November. It is a snapshot and will not include everyone in the area with a history of rough sleeping.

The **count** is a snapshot based on the number of people seen sleeping rough in the local authority area on a single night between 1 October and 30 November. It will not record everyone in the area with a history of rough sleeping.

An estimate may be appropriate if any of these factors apply:

- Sleep sites are inaccessible e.g. in woods or dispersed across rural areas
- Sleep sites are 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 count
- There is regular intelligence gathering in place by a number of agencies e.g. by an outreach team, day centre, park wardens
- Numbers of people sleeping rough are consistently low and they are already in touch with services, and partner agencies agree this is the case
- The local authority can gather sufficient intelligence on people sleeping rough 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.

An estimate informed by a spotlight count may be appropriate if:

- There are 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 partners about which method is right for the area
- Additional robust intelligence comes to light on the night of the count about hidden rough sleeping.

A count may be appropriate if any of the following factors apply:

- A significant change in the number, population or location of people sleeping rough where sites are visible
- High numbers of people sleeping rough in the area with no ongoing data collection e.g. no/limited outreach
- An increase or fluctuations in numbers of people sleeping rough where sleep sites are accessible/visible
- Difficulties forming an estimate on the basis of the information available
- Significant disagreement about the numbers between agencies.

Local authorities can decide whether to count or estimate in order to determine their single figure. They should use the method that will most accurately reflect the number of those sleeping rough in their area.

The decision to count or estimate should be made by mid-September so that there is time to plan next steps – a count requires 6 weeks' lead-in time.

A multi-agency meeting and intelligence gathering exercise can help to inform the decision. This is described below.

If you have decided on your process, please refer to the Counts Process or Estimates Process sections of the Counts & Estimates Toolkit. If not, see the guidance below on how to arrive at a decision.

Consulting with local agencies

Local partner agencies should be consulted ahead of a count or estimate, to see if patterns of rough sleeping have changed and to check if there are any factors that might affect the choice of a 'typical night'.

The local authority should involve those local agencies that will have the most accurate information about who is sleeping rough on which to base the estimate or inform the count.

Local partners could include:

- Outreach teams
- Hostels, day centres, night shelters
- Housing department
- Police, community safety teams
- Park rangers
- Faith groups, soup runs, street pastors
- Advice agencies
- Housing associations
- Social Services, youth workers, Probation
- Health and mental health services
- Refuse collectors, town centre/local retail security/management, street wardens

Local authorities can also contact Homeless Link's Counts & Estimates Project Manager for support: verifiers@homelesslink.org.uk

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 which brings together key homelessness agencies, such as a Task & Targeting 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 to count or estimate.

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 the process will meet validation requirements.

See template agenda, notes and information gathering form below.

AGENDA & NOTES FOR AN INTELLIGENCE GATHERING MEETING

A. Welcome, introductions and apologies

- The Chair should open the meeting with a brief overview of the need to submit a count or estimate and include local context about practice to date in terms of counting and estimates.
- 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 Estimate Forms and Resources section of the toolkit.

B. Who to include in the count or 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 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.
- Discuss with the group that the count/estimate must only include those rough sleeping on that single 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, under-25s, and British, EU and non-EU nationals.

C. Key hot spots and estimated numbers

Chair to ask each representative to outline:

- Where they think the rough sleeping hotspots are in the 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 an 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.

D. Deciding whether to count or estimate

An estimate may be appropriate if any of these factors apply:

- Sleep sites are inaccessible e.g. in woods or dispersed across rural areas
- Sleep sites are 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 count
- There is regular intelligence gathering in place by a number of agencies e.g. by an outreach team, day centre, park wardens
- Numbers of people sleeping rough are consistently low and they are already in touch with services, and partner agencies agree this is the case
- The local authority can gather sufficient intelligence on people sleeping rough 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.

An estimate informed by a spotlight count may be appropriate if:

- There are 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 partners about which method is right for the area
- Additional robust intelligence comes to light on the night of the count about hidden rough sleeping.

A count may be appropriate if any of the following factors apply:

- A significant change in the number, population or location of people sleeping rough where sites are visible
- High numbers of people sleeping rough in the area with no ongoing data collection e.g. no/limited outreach
- An increase or fluctuations in numbers of people sleeping rough where sleep sites are accessible/visible
- Difficulties forming an estimate on the basis of the information available
- Significant disagreement about the numbers between agencies.

They should use the method that they think will reflect the number of those rough sleeping in their area most accurately.

ACTION: Local authority to decide whether to count or estimate, and agree the date of the typical night that will be used.

INVITE TEMPLATE FOR AN INTELLIGENCE GATHERING MEETING

[Date]

Dear colleague

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 or submitting an evidence-based estimate of the number of people rough sleeping on a 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 single figure count or 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. Your knowledge, expertise and intelligence will ensure a wider range of reliable information on which to base the estimate or make the decision to count.

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

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

The count or estimate is a one-off snapshot of the numbers people sleeping rough in an area; it also 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

Counts can be complemented by other monitoring and audits for a full picture. Examples include:

1. Street needs audits

Some local authority areas have carried out street needs audits. These are one-off snapshots that can supplement and strengthen street count data by asking for more detailed information 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 shouldn't be combined with a count or estimate. 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, including a toolkit and areas that have taken part (Brighton & Hove, Croydon, Leicester, Sheffield, Torbay and Westminster) see: www.world-habitat.org/our-programmes/homelessness/

2. 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.

Funded by the Department of Health, the audit tool has been piloted by Homeless Link across services in England. 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.

For more details visit: www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/homeless-health-needs-audit

3. Multi-agency meetings or Task & Targeting groups

These groups can gather intelligence and coordinate a response 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 anti-social behaviour and community safety, and/or a strategic focus through monitoring trends to inform

commissioning and planning. Local multi-agency groups can enable the facilitation of reconnection and sideways moves between accommodation services. A Task & Targeting toolkit is available: www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/task-and-targeting-toolkit

4. 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.

5. Analysing local data

Gathering information about clients 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 information and free toolkits see: www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/show-your-impact

As well as homelessness providers, it can be useful to explore other opportunities to analyse data about housing need collected by related support agencies, including substance misuse services (via the National Drug Treatment Monitoring Service), the Probation Service and Community Mental Health Teams.

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.

For more information on CHAIN visit: www.mungos.org/chain

6. The Prevention Opportunities Mapping and Planning Toolkit (PrOMPT)

PrOMPT is a toolkit to assist local authorities, their partners, and the communities they serve, to improve planning and commissioning of services that create opportunities to prevent rough sleeping.

The toolkit sets out an approach that involves people who have direct experience of sleeping rough as experts in identifying pathways into rough sleeping and the points in the journey where more effective interventions would have helped.

The toolkit includes advice on how to get the relevant partners together to lead the process, an electronic audit and analysis tool, and help to produce an action plan based on the findings.

For more information or to access the toolkit visit: www.homeless.org.uk/prompt

7. 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 time 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.