Rough Sleeping Estimates Toolkit 2019
Forms and resources for local authorities
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Full toolkit available at:
Facilitator’s notes for an estimate meeting
These notes are designed as a starting point and can be adapted for local use.

1. 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 counts and 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).

2. 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.

3. Including a spotlight count
   Where a spotlight count is one of the data sources, the Chair asks the Count Coordinator to confirm that the count was carried out in accordance with guidance:
   - Spotlight counts take place after midnight on the typical night

4. 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 should include, where known: name, age, gender, nationality, rough sleeping location, evidence that an individual is rough sleeping and other agencies working with the individual. 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, task and targeting groups, 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 rough sleeping.

The discussion needs to take into account disagreements between agencies about whether individuals were rough sleeping on the typical night (i.e. those who are sleeping 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 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 count-based estimate, evidence-based estimate, or evidence-based estimate including a spotlight count 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 snapshot 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 evidence-based estimate, the typical night we are using is [date].

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

Please come prepared with information about known people sleeping rough that you have contact with, including times and location. For spotlight counts, the Count Coordinator should ask counters to use the ‘Rough sleeping count form’ (Excel download) published as part of Homeless Link’s toolkit, or a locally created version: www.homeless.org.uk/our-work/resources/counts-and-estimates-evaluating-extent-of-rough-sleeping

For other data sources, see the form overleaf 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 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].

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

Many thanks for your involvement.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First name or initial</th>
<th>Surname</th>
<th>DoB /Age 18 / 18-24 / 25-65 / not known*</th>
<th>Gender note male / female / other identity / not known or not disclosed*</th>
<th>Nationality note if UK / other EU / non-EU / not known*</th>
<th>Rough sleeping location</th>
<th>Evidence that the individual was rough sleeping on the agreed ‘typical’ night’</th>
<th>Other agencies working with individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: Jo Smith</td>
<td></td>
<td>09/12/79</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>British</td>
<td>Central area of town – behind main carpark</td>
<td>Presented at project previous day and self-reported. Known not to have any housing.</td>
<td>Known to Community Safety Team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Is any demographic data not known? Include notes to explain why
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 snapshot figure indicating the numbers of people sleeping rough on a single night in their area to the Ministry of 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 British, other EU or non-EU 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 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.

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:

- Surname
- 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 Ministry of 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 will be responsible for the accuracy of the data they keep, it will then be 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 farm land which cannot be accessed without prior permission, and so are excluded from the count. An evidence-based estimate may be a more appropriate process.

Rural areas with rough sleeping hotspots
Where geography/resources make it difficult to carry out a count-based estimate across the entire area, local authorities should consider whether an evidence-based estimate, which gathers evidence from a range of different partners who are working with people sleeping rough, would be a more appropriate approach to provide the most accurate and robust snapshot figure. Where there are rough sleeping hotspots, for example a market town in an otherwise rural local authority, a spotlight count can be used as one of the intelligence sources to inform the wider evidence-based estimate meeting, as long as it happens after midnight on the same typical night.

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.\(^1\) This may include women, young people, and people who are LGBTQ+.\(^2\) For example, women who sleep rough are often in hidden locations 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.\(^3\) 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 police in street counts can be helpful in this situation, as long as any engagement is approached sensitively. A multiple source estimate may be more likely to include under-represented groups, especially if specialist agencies are involved e.g. LGBTQ+ charities.

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\(^2\) www.homeless.org.uk/supporting-lgbtq-people

\(^3\) 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.
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.

Transitional public spaces
Last year, Homeless Link asked about people in transitional public spaces such as hospital waiting rooms, stations and other 24-hour spaces. We were concerned that people might be missed from the definition of rough sleeping, because they are not bedded down, and are instead there for safety as a sit-up space overnight. However, we did not find any evidence of people in these spaces being missed from the counts. As a result, we are no longer asking a separate question about transitional public spaces. Any local authorities with concerns about how to count in transitional spaces should consult Homeless Link for guidance on a case-by-case basis.

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’, for example 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. 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 use the estimate process 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 are used as a base for sex work. There are also risks around drug use if people overdose while out of sight. 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.

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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, Coordinators should use the estimate process (supplemented by a count as necessary).

**Charity sleep-outs**
In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of 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 rough sleeping count 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 estimate informed by a spotlight count 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.
## Count risk assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk area</th>
<th>Actions to manage risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Travel to and from the base of operations at unsocial hours** | • Count Coordinator books and pays for taxis in advance to/from the base of operations, as needed.  
• Count Coordinator checks that everyone due to take part signs in and out of both the initial meeting and debriefing sessions.  
• 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. |
| **Counters working at night in dispersed and isolated areas** | • Count Coordinator ensures that the Health & Safety checklist is read and understood by each counter.  
• Counters work in pairs and remain with their count partner at all times.  
• Where possible, a counter with local knowledge and/or experience providing support is included in each pair.  
• Each pair of counters has a mobile phone (charged and with credit) with essential contact numbers e.g. for the base of operations.  
• Count Coordinator issues additional mobile phones as necessary at the start of the count.  
• Count Coordinator has a contact mobile phone number for each pair of counters.  
• Counters have a map with their counting area clearly marked.  
• 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.  
• 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 |
| **Counters entering dark, unknown or high risk areas** | • 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.  
• Counters are issued with torches / visibility clothing / panic alarms  
• 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.  
• Counters check mobile phone reception periodically and move quickly out of areas where the signal is poor.  
• 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). |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk area</th>
<th>Actions to manage risk</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counters find unknown people sleeping rough</td>
<td>• Counters instructed never to shine a torch in anyone’s face.   &lt;br&gt; • The Count Coordinator gives guidance on whether to wake people – usually only experienced staff. &lt;br&gt; • Counters assess risk before and during each interaction and move away if they feel unsafe. &lt;br&gt; • Counters carry information cards/leaflets to leave with people, so they know where to seek help next day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counters find themselves or others in a situation of immediate concern/risk</td>
<td>• Counting teams agree a code word to let colleagues know if they feel uncomfortable or at risk in a situation.  &lt;br&gt; • If possible, move away from the incident and find a safe location from which to call.  &lt;br&gt; • Call the police for assistance. &lt;br&gt; • Once in a safe location, call to report the incident to the Count Coordinator. &lt;br&gt; • Coordinator debriefs with the counters on their return and follows up with a call a few days later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns about the health of someone on the streets</td>
<td>• 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A person sleeping rough is under 18 years old</td>
<td>• 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.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counters being challenged about their activities</td>
<td>• The Count Coordinator issues an ID letter explaining the count.   &lt;br&gt; • Counters carry ID at all times.  &lt;br&gt; • Police (and, where appropriate, private security companies or other partners) are told that the count is taking place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counters waking people in the open / in tents</td>
<td>• 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 record their details. &lt;br&gt; • Counters should not stand over people as they attempt to wake them.  &lt;br&gt; • Counters should not touch people who are sleeping to wake them – politely speak or call to them. &lt;br&gt; • Counters should stand several paces back, with a second counter further back. &lt;br&gt; • Counters should not open tents, instead call out and then ask each person in the tent to respond. &lt;br&gt; • It may be helpful to request the assistance of the local police in waking individuals who counters are unable to wake.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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, don’t 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 don’t feel confident to do so
- Call the Coordinator to request Social Services and/or Police support if a child is sleeping rough and stay with/near them until help arrives
- Keep in regular contact with base of operations and follow the briefing instructions
- Inform base of operations immediately of any incidents, and of any delays
- At the end of the count report back to base of operations, 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**

- Split up from your team/partner whilst conducting the count
- Approach anyone who is displaying aggressive or violent behaviour
- Shine your torch in anyone’s face or wake people using physical contact
- Go into derelict buildings/squats/building sites if no prior planning has taken place to get support from the police or other agency
- 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
- Stand over or touch anyone as you wake them
- Open tents
- Use alcohol or an illegal substance prior to undertaking a count
- 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