

National Rough Sleeping Count, Wales, 2007 and 2008

This article covers the national rough sleeper counts which were carried out in March 2007 and again in March 2008 by local authorities, in partnership with other local agencies, in order to gauge the extent of rough sleeping in Wales. The article highlights the issues associated with single-night rough sleeper counts and their likely influence on the accuracy of information on levels of rough sleeping across Wales.

1. Summary

- There are a range of factors which can impact on single-night counts of rough sleepers, including location, timing and weather.
- The counts carried out in March 2007 and 2008 in Wales are essentially snapshot estimates and can provide only a very broad indication of rough sleeping levels on the night of the count.
- Latest data from March 2008 shows that the number of rough sleepers across Wales is likely to be in the range of 128 to 165 people.

2. Results

A full set of results, from both the March 2007 and the March 2008 count, are provided in tables 1 and 2. The data shown in these tables however provide only a very broad indication of the level of rough sleeping across Wales. Data based solely upon the observations made by local authority representatives on the night of the count may, as stated in Section 5, be affected by a number of factors including severe weather, inaccessibility to certain areas, local knowledge and other factors specific to a locality.

As shown in tables 1 and 2:

- In March 2007 local authorities observed 69 individuals sleeping rough and a further 69 instances of other evidence of rough sleeping, leading to a total estimate of 138 rough sleepers in Wales on the night of the count.
- In March 2008 local authorities observed 65 individuals sleeping rough and a further 59 instances of other evidence of rough sleeping, leading to a total estimate of 124 rough sleepers in Wales on the night of the count.

As a single night count will not provide a complete picture, local authorities were also asked to provide details of any additional sources of data used to identify the level of rough sleeping in their area. These might include needs mapping information for Supporting People, contacts with outreach services and information from joint-working arrangements.

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1 Notes on the use of statistical articles can be found at the end of this document.

In order to compare the information from these sources to the level of rough sleeping identified by the count, local authorities were asked to provide an estimate of whether the figures were higher, lower or about the same. In both the March 2007 and March 2008 counts the majority of local authorities, 9 and 8 respectively, reported that the count provided roughly similar information on the level of rough sleeping within their area as that obtained from all other sources (Chart 1). However, taking into account the likely variation in numbers provided by each local authority, for Wales overall the count of rough sleepers was judged to be an underestimate in 2007 and 2008.

As shown in tables 1 and 2:

- In March 2007, an estimate based on evidence from other sources available to local authorities shows the total number of rough sleepers could vary between an approximate range of 166 and 199.
- In March 2008, an estimate based on evidence from other sources available to local authorities shows the total number of rough sleepers could vary between an approximate range of 128 and 165.

Further detail on the methodology used to calculate these ranges is provided in the 'Quality Information' section.

In order to assess whether different or additional emergency provision might be needed at national and local levels, the local authorities were asked to provide information on the number of emergency spaces available in their area on the night of the count and the number of these which were vacant. To allow for further validation of data, information on emergency provision will be published at a later date.

In March 2008 local authorities in Wales were also asked to provide information on any action taken as a result of the previous count of rough sleepers in March 2007. This included information on:

- **The development and implementation of systems of continuous monitoring of rough sleeping.**
Only one authority did not record either any existing systems for continuous monitoring or plans for developing such systems.
- **The planning of new services for people sleeping rough.**
15 of the 22 authorities reported new services having been planned or already implemented. Of the remaining authorities most stated low levels of rough sleeping or lack of resources as the reason for no action being taken.
- **The implementation of new or improvement of existing services for people sleeping rough**
Only 4 of the 22 authorities reported no action being taken predominantly because of low levels of rough sleeping within their area.

The Welsh Assembly Government is placing increasing emphasis on the importance of continuous monitoring to identify the levels of rough sleeping. It is currently funding a research project to establish good practice guidance for local authorities and partners in continuous monitoring and this is due to be published in early 2009.

3. Background

The Welsh Assembly Government has a long established objective to end the need for anyone to sleep rough by ensuring appropriate and accessible accommodation is available. The amount of information on the extent of rough sleeping in Wales has however been limited, and where surveys have been carried out there have been inconsistencies in methods, timing and coverage. In February 2000 the research report 'Rough Sleeping in Wales' recommended the establishment of a consistent format and method of keeping records of rough sleeping.

The 'Code of Guidance for Local Authorities on Allocation of Accommodation and Homelessness 2003' also recommended that local authorities make specific efforts to identify the extent of rough sleeping using snapshot and continuing data collection across a range of agencies.

The National Homelessness Strategy 2006-2008 expects local authorities to proactively monitor rough sleeping through a combination of counts and continuous monitoring. The Welsh Assembly Government will be consulting on a 10 year plan to confront homelessness in the autumn of 2008, and this plan will address the issue of rough sleeping.

The main aims of single-night counts of rough sleeping at a local level are:

- to provide the information needed for progress monitoring by the Assembly Government;
- to inform national policy responses and local authority plans including Local Homelessness Strategies and Supporting People Operational Plans;
- to inform local, strategic and service planning.

4. Coverage

The rough sleeper counts in Wales were carried out by local authorities during a chosen date of either the 2nd Tuesday, 2nd Wednesday or 2nd Thursday night of March each year between midnight and 9 am. The definition of rough sleeping used for the purposes of these counts was that recommended in the National Homeless Strategy 2006-2008, that is, 'people who are sleeping, or bedded down, in the open air; people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation.'

Local authorities were asked to provide information on the number of individuals observed sleeping rough, the number of individuals not bedded down but where there was evidence of rough sleeping and the number of emergency beds available on the night of the count. The local authorities were also asked about other sources of information used to determine the level of rough sleeping within their areas and how this compared with the information collected on the night of the count. In March 2008 local authorities were also asked to provide information on any actions taken as a result of the previous count. To reflect concerns arising from the 2007 count, the 2008 count incorporated revised guidance on the timing of the counts and information to be obtained from rough sleepers.

5. Issues

There are significant limitations to the use of single-night counts in providing an accurate picture of the number of rough sleepers across Wales. The counts are snapshot estimates and can provide only a very broad indication of rough sleeping levels in particular areas on the night of the count. A low number of rough sleepers identified by the count does not automatically mean low levels of rough sleeping or that rough sleeping is not an issue within that area.

The issues described have been collated based on feedback on the experience of these counts in Wales, as well as findings from counts carried out in England and Scotland. Reference has also been made to articles and reports from UK based agencies involved with the homeless as well as outreach organisations and comments from other key local homelessness agencies and local authorities involved in the single-night counts within Wales.

A single-night count cannot record everyone in an area with a history of rough sleeping as many of those who sleep rough do so intermittently, being caught in a pattern of moving from hostels to the streets and back again. Many rough sleepers choose places to sleep which avoid the risk of being detected. Those carrying out the count may lack experience of rough sleepers, or have no local knowledge of the area or where rough sleeping may be taking place. Despite guidance being provided, there could be inconsistencies between local authorities in the criteria used for counting.

There are a range of factors which can influence the accuracy of any information provided including:

Location

- **Rural and coastal areas:** It is logistically more difficult to carry out an accurate single-night count of rough sleepers in large rural and coastal areas than in urban areas. The area to cover is greater and there are 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 individual people sleeping rough on sites on their own and these may be spread out over a large area. In such authorities those carrying out the count cannot cover all possible sites and will be forced 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.
- **Urban areas:** In cities and large towns while it is easier to carry out a single-night count, as those sleeping rough will be concentrated within a relatively small area and tend to congregate in groups, there are other issues. 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 actual rough sleepers. There are also safety issues involved in entering some of the possible locations for those sleeping rough such as derelict buildings and building sites. There are problems obtaining accurate numbers in areas where rough sleepers may move across local authority boundaries particularly if the street counts are carried out at different dates or times within neighbouring boroughs.

Timing

The date chosen for the count may conflict with local events involving high levels of police activity such as sports matches and carnivals. This will cause those sleeping rough to move on temporarily and thus distort the findings. The day of the week chosen for the count may also influence the results as key days, such as benefit collection days, may give a false picture of the average rough sleeper levels in the area. The start and finish times chosen for the count may also influence the results by the mistaken inclusion of those on the streets but not sleeping rough and the exclusion of those rough sleepers who are not yet bedded down. People seen late at night drinking in the street or begging are not necessarily sleeping rough and can be a particularly significant issue in busy city centre areas.

The guidance provided for the counts permitted some flexibility in both dates and start and finish times in order to minimise these difficulties.

Weather

The weather is a major factor influencing the number of people sleeping rough on any given night. Severe weather conditions will force many people who normally sleep rough to use a night shelter or hostel or to 'sofa surf', that is, rely on a friend to provide shelter for the night. These would be excluded from the count and thus distort the level of rough sleeping shown. Bad weather will make it more difficult for those carrying out the count to gain an accurate figure as rough sleepers may be forced to shelter in locations which are difficult to access or insecure. Several authorities cited the weather, particularly in March 2008, as having a significant impact on the number of rough sleepers counted. It was recognised that the severe weather around the time of the count may have forced many of those who normally sleep rough on the streets to take shelter in locations not familiar to or accessible by those carrying out the count, such as sheds or building sites.

Chart 1. How the overall level of rough sleepers as estimated by evidence from other sources compares with the data provided by the single-night count.

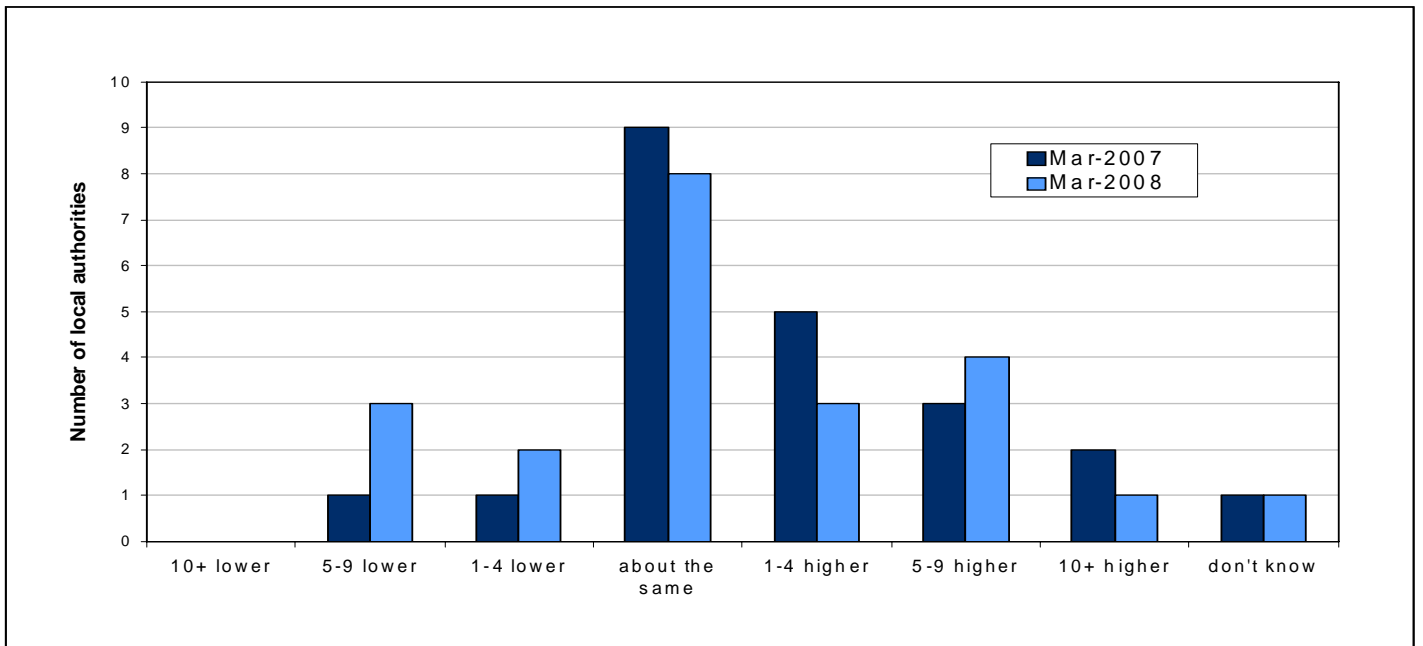


Table 1 - Rough sleeper count March 2007

	Individuals sleeping rough			Estimate based on other sources (a)		
	Number observed	Other evidence of rough sleeping	Total	Variation compared to count	Lower bound	Higher bound
Isle of Anglesey	2	10	12	1-4 higher	13	16
Gwynedd	8	0	8	10+ higher	18	18
Conwy	3	0	3	1-4 higher	4	7
Denbighshire	5	2	7	not known	7	7
Flintshire	1	2	3	5-9 higher	8	12
Wrexham	4	4	8	similar	8	8
Powys	3	1	4	similar	4	4
Ceredigion	0	0	0	similar	0	0
Pembrokeshire	0	4	4	similar	4	4
Carmarthenshire	4	4	8	5-9 lower	0	3
Swansea	7	7	14	similar	14	14
Neath Port Talbot	1	5	6	1-4 lower	2	5
Bridgend	5	4	9	5-9 higher	14	18
The Vale of Glamorgan	1	0	1	similar	1	1
Cardiff	12	14	26	similar	26	26
Rhondda Cynon Taf	2	5	7	5-9 higher	12	16
Merthyr Tydfil	1	0	1	similar	1	1
Caerphilly	0	2	2	10+ higher	12	12
Blaenau Gwent	0	0	0	1-4 higher	1	4
Torfaen	0	0	0	1-4 higher	1	4
Monmouthshire	1	0	1	1-4 higher	2	5
Newport	9	5	14	similar	14	14
Wales	69	69	138		166	199

Source: Welsh Assembly Government

(a) Further detail on the methodology used to calculate these ranges is provided in the 'Quality Information' section.

Table 2 - Rough sleeper count March 2008

	Individuals sleeping rough			Estimate based on other sources (a)		
	Number observed	Other evidence of rough	Total	Variation compared to count	Lower bound	Higher bound
Isle of Anglesey	0	0	0	1-4 higher	1	4
Gwynedd	7	5	12	5-9 higher	17	21
Conwy	5	7	12	5-9 lower	3	7
Denbighshire	8	3	11	similar	11	11
Flintshire	0	0	0	not known	.	.
Wrexham	12	3	15	5-9 higher	20	24
Powys	0	2	2	similar	2	2
Ceredigion	1	0	1	similar	1	1
Pembrokeshire	0	0	0	similar	0	0
Carmarthenshire	5	6	11	5-9 higher	16	20
Swansea	10	5	15	1-4 lower	11	14
Neath Port Talbot	0	4	4	1-4 lower	0	3
Bridgend	1	4	5	5-9 lower	0	0
The Vale of Glamorgan	0	0	0	similar	0	0
Cardiff	13	13	26	1-4 higher	27	30
Rhondda Cynon Taf	0	1	1	5-9 higher	6	10
Merthyr Tydfil	0	0	0	1-4 higher	1	4
Caerphilly	0	2	2	10+ higher	12	12
Blaenau Gwent	0	0	0	similar	0	0
Torfaen	0	0	0	similar	0	0
Monmouthshire	0	0	0	similar	0	0
Newport	3	4	7	5-9 lower	0	2
Wales	65	59	124		128	165

Source: Welsh Assembly Government

(a) Further detail on the methodology used to calculate these ranges is provided in the 'Quality Information' section.

Glossary

1. Individuals observed sleeping rough

People who are sleeping, or bedded down, in the open air; people in buildings or other places not designed for habitation. Includes people sleeping:

- on the streets
- in doorways
- in parks
- in bus shelters
- in buildings not designed for habitation such as:
 - barns
 - sheds
 - car parks
 - cars
 - derelict boats
 - stations
 - squats
 - tents
 - makeshift shelters

The definition does not include people in hostels or shelters, people in campsites or other sites used for recreational purposes.

2. Individuals possibly sleeping rough indicated by 'other evidence of rough sleeping'

- Individuals who are not bedded down but who the counters (or other members of the count team) know sleep rough, or for whom local knowledge indicates they sleep rough.
- Where clear evidence of rough sleeping such as bedding is found, but no-one actually sleeping rough.
- Buildings/areas which the counters did not enter but local knowledge indicates are regularly used for rough sleeping. (It is acceptable for this information to have been gleaned during a day time reconnaissance if it is felt too dangerous to visit these sites during the count).
- Where individuals are seen to appear likely to bed down later in the night, such as people carrying bedding.

3. Emergency bed provision and vacancies

Emergency bed - Provision that can be accessed at very short notice, i.e. on the same day/night, by an individual, either through self-referral, or via referral from an agency, and which is provided on a short-term basis. The provision should allow for an individual to have their own bedroom and be available to people regardless of their priority need.

Emergency space - Provision that can be accessed at very short notice, i.e. on the same day/night, by an individual, either through self-referral, or via referral from an agency, and which is provided on a short-term basis. The provision is either only available as specific winter provision during cold weather or/and does not allow for an individual to have their own bedroom and be available to people regardless of their priority need.

Vacancy - A vacancy is a situation in which an emergency bed or space was available for use but was not used for the whole night (midnight - 9am).

4. Other Sources

Additional sources of data used by an authority to identify the level of rough sleeping in their area will be required in order to measure the extent and needs of rough sleepers for planning local homelessness and housing services. These might include needs mapping information for Supporting People, contacts with outreach services, and information from joint-working arrangements.

Quality Information

1. Dates of counts

The rough sleeper count may not have been carried out on the same date by all local authorities. As explained in the 'Coverage' section, local authorities in Wales were asked to carry out a single night count of rough sleepers on the 2nd Tuesday, 2nd Wednesday or 2nd Thursday night during March 2007 and March 2008. A choice of dates was provided to avoid holding counts on nights when local events such as sports matches and carnivals might distort findings. These days might not all fall within the same calendar week

2. Data limitations

The 'Issues' section provides further details of the factors which limit the effectiveness of the data provided by means of a single-night count in providing an accurate number of rough sleepers in Wales.

3. Comparability with other counts

The results of the rough sleeper counts in Wales are based on actual numbers not estimates and cannot be compared with the English national rough sleeping estimate published each September by Communities and Local Government. The latter is an annual estimate based on a combination of recent street counts and estimates. Where no recent counts have taken place local authorities must submit an estimate. Any estimates of more than ten rough sleepers provided by local authorities in their Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix (HSSA) returns to Communities and Local Government should be validated by a count. For all other areas, zero estimates are assumed on the basis of local authorities' statistical returns.

All local authorities in Wales in March 2007 and March 2008 were required to carry out a count regardless of any estimates of the number of rough sleepers being less than 10.

4. Calculating the estimated range of rough sleepers

Tables 1 and 2 of the article include estimated ranges for the level of rough sleepers, using the single-night counts and evidence from other sources. To take account of evidence from other sources in the data collection returns, local authorities were asked: "Using your judgement, please comment on how the overall level of rough sleepers as provided by all sources compares with the data you have provided in tables 1 and 2", where table 1 of the form looks at individuals observed sleeping rough, and table 2 of the form asks for the number of individuals possibly sleeping rough indicated by other evidence of rough sleeping (bedding etc).

In tables 1 and 2 of this article, the range indicated by local authorities (for example, 1-4 higher, or 5-9 lower) is applied to the sum of the individuals found sleeping rough and possibly sleeping rough, to provide the 'best guess' at a range for the number of rough sleepers. The minimums and maximums of the range for each local authority are then added to provide a range for Wales.

5. Data collection returns

A copy of the rough sleeper data collection form and guidance is available to download from the Local Government data Unit website at:

<http://dissemination.dataunitwales.gov.uk/webview/>

Further information

Further information on housing statistics, including homelessness statistics, is available from the Statistics web site:

<http://www.wales.gov.uk/statistics>

Notes on the use of statistical articles

Statistical articles generally relate to one-off analyses for which there are no updates planned, at least in the short-term, and serve to make such analyses available to a wider audience than might otherwise be the case. They are mainly used to publish analyses that are exploratory in some way, for example:

- Introducing a new experimental series of data;
- A partial analysis of an issue which provides a useful starting point for further research but that nevertheless is a useful analysis in its own right;
- Drawing attention to research undertaken by other organisations, either commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government or otherwise, where it is useful to highlight the conclusions, or to build further upon the research;
- An analysis where the results may not be of as high quality as those in our routine statistical releases and bulletins, but where meaningful conclusions can still be drawn from the results.

Where quality is an issue, this may arise in one or more of the following ways:

- being unable to accurately specify the timeframe used (as can be the case when using an administrative source);
- the quality of the data source or data used; or
- other specified reasons.

However, the level of quality will be such that it does not significantly impact upon the conclusions. For example, the exact timeframe may not be central to the conclusions that can be drawn, or it is the order of magnitude of the results, rather than the exact results, that are of interest to the audience.

The analysis presented does not constitute a National Statistic, but may be based on National Statistics outputs and will nevertheless have been subject to careful consideration and detailed checking before publication. An assessment of the strengths and weaknesses in the analysis will be included in the article, for example comparisons with other sources, along with guidance on how the analysis might be used, and a description of the methodology applied.

Articles are subject to the release practices as defined by the release practices protocol, and so, for example, are published on a pre-announced date in the same way as other statistical outputs. Missing value symbols used in the article follow the standards used in other statistical outputs, as outlined below.

- .. The data item is not available
- . The data item is not applicable
- The data item is not exactly zero, but estimated as zero or less than half the final digit shown
- * The data item is disclosive or not sufficiently robust for publication