

Technical Note – Rough Sleeping Statistics England - Autumn 2010

Introduction

This technical note accompanies the new Experimental Official Statistics publication 'Rough Sleeping Statistics England - Autumn 2010' published here on the 17th February 2011:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/roughsleepingautumn2010>

The latest figures were collected under new guidance with changes made to the methodology and the definition of rough sleepers. This means that this series is not directly comparable with previous statistics on rough sleeping as we cannot separate the impact of the methodological changes from changes in the level of rough sleeping between autumn 2010 and earlier time periods. This note sets out and explains the differences between the autumn 2010 rough sleeping statistics and previously published figures on rough sleeping

Background

Between 1998 and 2010 rough sleeping was measured by street counts in areas with a known or suspected rough sleeping problem. Local authorities were asked to conduct an annual count if they estimated there were more than 10 rough sleepers in the area. In 2010 70 authorities submitted street counts and the total of these counts was 440 rough sleepers.

In June 2010, to supplement the counts, local authorities that had not conducted a street count were asked to provide an estimate of the number of rough sleepers on a given night. The 256 authorities that had not counted submitted estimates that totalled 807 rough sleepers. The combined total of estimates and counts of rough sleepers in England in 2010 was 1,247; this comprised 440 from the 70 authorities that conducted a count and 807 from the 256 authorities that provided estimates. These figures were published as experimental official statistics in July 2010:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/roughsleepingcount2010>

Following the publication of these figures a public consultation on evaluating the extent of rough sleeping was run over the summer 2010, and new guidance for local authorities was published in September 2010 explaining how to carry out rough sleeping counts and estimates:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/1713784.pdf>

The main differences between this and guidance on which previous rough sleeping figures were based are:

1. Conducting street counts is a choice for individual local authorities based on their assessment of whether the local rough sleeping problem justifies counting – for instance, where local intelligence suggests there are rough sleepers in the area on a regular basis or that numbers may be increasing. Counts are no longer required by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) when local authorities assess that they have more than 10 rough sleepers as was previously the case.

2. Where a local authority decides not to count they should submit a robust estimate of the number of people rough sleeping on a typical night. They should consult with and gather information from all agencies dealing with rough sleepers in their area, including the local community, to help compile and agree the figure. The rough sleeping guidance has been revised to include a new section offering local authorities some basic guidance on how to estimate numbers. Detailed supplementary guidance on estimates has been produced by Homeless Link and is available at: www.homeless.org.uk/evaluating-roughsleeping.

3. The definition of rough sleeper has been expanded. The definition of what constitutes being “bedded down” has changed to include rough sleepers about to bed down (e.g. sitting or standing near their bedding but not actually lying down). The definition includes people in tents (not on campsites or on organised protests).

4. The guidance encourages neighbouring authorities to count on the same night and to count on a sub-regional or regional basis to avoid missing (or counting twice) rough sleepers who move back and forth between local authority areas.

5. The recommended starting time for counts should be geared to local circumstances. Counts can take place from midnight but should be later where rough sleepers bed down later (e.g. in city centres), so they can be counted.

6. DCLG will no longer provide officials to attend and oversee that counts are being conducted in accordance with the agreed methodology. The responsibility for providing independent verifiers to attend counts will become a responsibility of Homeless Link (the national membership charity for frontline homelessness agencies) and they will draw volunteers from their member agencies and interested faith groups.

Following the publication of this new guidance, counts and estimates for autumn 2010 were carried out by local authorities between 1st October and 30th November 2010. The total of rough sleeping counts and estimates in autumn 2010 based on the new guidance was 1768. This new series has been published as experimental official statistics:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/roughsleepingautumn2010>

The changes that have been made to the methodology and the definition of rough sleepers make it very difficult to make comparisons over time as we cannot separate the impact of these methodological changes from changes in the level of rough sleeping between autumn 2010 and earlier time periods.

Comparison of autumn 2010 with summer 2010 figures

Note – for the purposes of this Technical Annex the figures published in July 2010 which comprised street counts between January 2009 and May 2010 and estimates in June 2010 will be referred to as the ‘summer 2010’ figures.

The total of rough sleeping counts and estimates in autumn 2010 collected under the new guidance was 1,768 compared to a figure of 1,247 for summer 2010 based upon the old guidance.

(i) Estimates and Counts

In autumn 2010 following the issue of new guidance on evaluating the extent of rough sleeping 42 authorities provided a count and the remaining 284 authorities provided an estimate figure. The summer 2010 figures comprised 70 counts and 256 estimates. The table and bullet points below compare the summer and autumn 2010 series based on whether authorities counted or estimated in each period.

- 242 LAs (74 per cent) provided estimates under both sets of guidance. The total of these estimates was 730 in the summer 2010 series and 1043 in the autumn series, a difference of 43 per cent.
- 28 LAs (18 per cent) provided counts under both sets of guidance. The total of these counts was 296 in the summer series and 348 in the autumn series, a difference of 18 per cent.
- 42 LAs (12 per cent) provided a count in the summer and an estimate in the autumn. The total of these figures was 144 in the summer series and 318 in the autumn series, a difference of 121 per cent.
- 14 LAs (4 per cent) provided an estimate in the summer and a count in the autumn. The total of these figures was 77 in the summer series and 59 in the autumn series, a difference of -23 per cent.

Table 1 – Total of counts and estimates in summer and autumn 2010 by method used by authorities in each set of figures

Method, Summer/Autumn	Number of LAs	Summer total	Autumn total	Difference between series:	
				Number	Percentage
Count/Count	28	296	348	52	18%
Count/Estimate	42	144	318	174	121%
Estimate/Count	14	77	59	-18	-23%
Estimate/Estimate	242	730	1043	313	43%
All LAs	326	1247	1768	521	42%

Source – DCLG Rough sleeping statistics

The total difference between the summer series and the autumn series was 521 rough sleepers or 42 per cent. The majority of this increase was in authorities that estimated in the autumn. Feedback from several local authorities was that the new methodology allowed them to gather local intelligence and submit an estimate which more completely reflected the number of rough sleepers in the area on a given night.

This was reported by authorities that submitted a count in the summer series but also by authorities that had estimated in the summer who had based their estimate on historic counts. This view was put forward particularly by rural authorities for whom many known rough sleepers are in areas in which a count is impractical or unsafe, e.g. woods, meadows and riverbanks. The next section looks in more detail at the differences between urban and rural authorities.

It is interesting to note that in the small number of authorities that provided an estimate in the summer and a count in the autumn there were 18 fewer rough sleepers or 23% less.¹ It is possible that count figures, which are reliant on circumstances on the day, differ to estimate figures which take an average view over a few days. When evaluating these experimental statistics we will investigate these differences further.

In those authorities that submitted a count in both the summer and autumn returns there was a smaller increase of 18 per cent. Note, the guidance for counts changed too and was widened to include those about to bed down and those in tents.

It is therefore not possible to determine accurately whether rough sleeping has increased as we cannot separate the differences resulting from methodological changes from changes in the level of rough sleeping between time periods. Later in this note, to further investigate trends we examine data from the Combined Homelessness and information Network (CHAIN) for London which contains information about people seen contacted by outreach teams and those who have accessed accommodation for rough sleepers in London and has been collected consistently over time.

(ii) Urban and Rural

The table and bullet points below compare total rough sleeping statistics between the summer and autumn 2010 for urban and rural LAs.

- The total of rough sleeping counts and estimates in urban authorities was 848 in the summer 2010 series and 1078 in the autumn series, a difference of 28 per cent.
- The total of rough sleeping counts and estimates in rural authorities was 399 in the summer 2010 series and 690 in the autumn series, a difference of 73 per cent.

¹ A large part of this decrease was in St. Albans where there was a difference of -11, following an estimate in June of 13 rough sleepers and a count in the autumn of 2. The authority and verifier agree that the count figure is an under-estimate of the rough sleeping problem in the authority as a combination of counting on market day and severe weather are likely to have resulted in fewer rough sleepers found than would normally be the case.

Table 2 - Total of counts and estimates in summer and autumn 2010 by in urban and rural authorities

	Number of LAs	Summer total	Autumn total	Difference between series:	
				Number	Percentage
Urban LAs	168	848	1078	230	28%
Rural LAs	158	399	690	291	73%
All LAs	326	1247	1768	521	42%

Source – DCLG *Rough sleeping statistics*.

DEFRA urban/rural classification where rural is defined as a local authority with more than 26 per cent of their population in rural settlements. Further detail is available here:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/rural/rural-definition.htm>

The difference between the summer and autumn 2010 figures is greatest for authorities in rural areas. We already know that these differences varied by whether authorities counted or estimated at each period. The table below shows the different combinations in urban and rural authorities. These figures, especially the percentage difference between the two series, should be treated with caution where the number of authorities is low.

In the 15 rural LAs that provided an estimate for the first time in autumn 2010 the total number of rough sleepers was 38 from counts in the summer series and 157 from estimates in the autumn series. This substantiates feedback from local authorities that the change in guidance to allow intelligence led estimates has allowed more rough sleepers to be counted. There was also a difference of 52 per cent in urban authorities that estimated in autumn 2010 having provided a count for the summer 2010 series. This suggests the change in methodology has led to higher figures being returned in both rural and urban areas.

Table 3 - Total of counts and estimates in summer and autumn 2010 by method used in each set of figures in urban and rural authorities

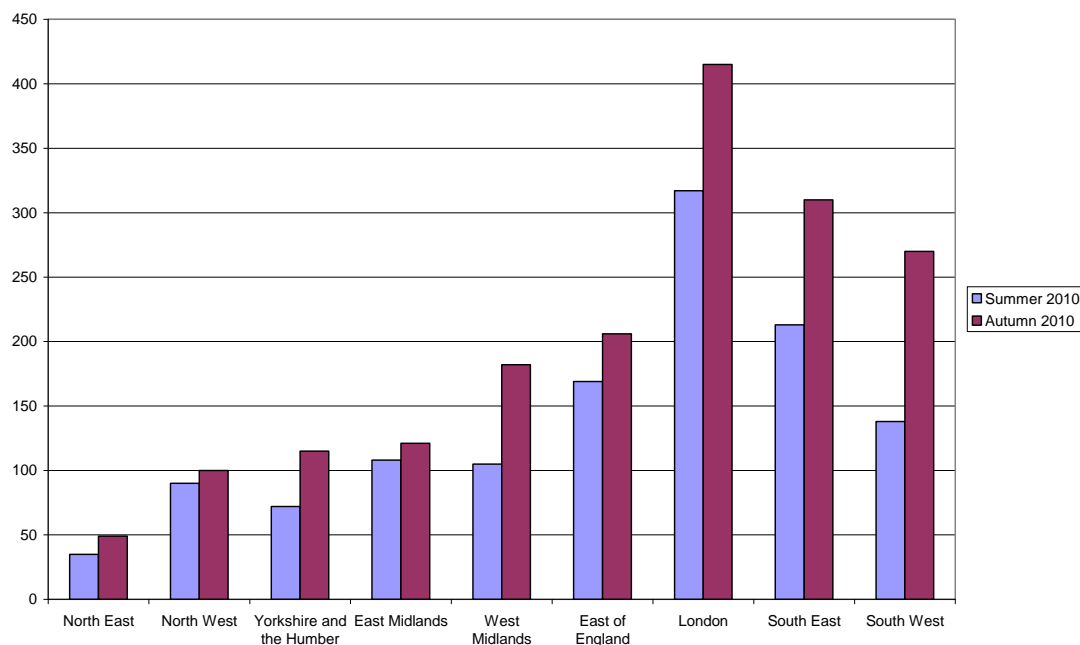
		Number of LAs	Summer total	Autumn total	Difference between series:	
					Number	Percentage
Urban LAs	Count/Count	22	288	326	38	13%
	Count/Est	27	106	161	55	52%
	Est/Count	10	57	50	-7	-12%
	Est/Est	109	397	541	144	36%
Rural LAs	Count/Count	6	8	22	14	175%
	Count/Est	15	38	157	119	313%
	Est/Count	4	20	9	-11	-55%
	Est/Est	133	333	502	169	51%

Source – DCLG *Rough sleeping statistics*

(iii) Regional

The Chart and Table below show the differences between rough sleeping figures in the summer and autumn series.

Figure 1 – Regional rough sleeping totals in summer and autumn 2010



Source - DCLG Rough sleeping statistics

Figures are higher in the autumn series in all regions. The biggest difference was in the South West where 138 rough sleepers were reported in the summer series and 270 rough sleepers were reported in the autumn series, a difference of 96 per cent². The next biggest differences were in London, the South East and the West Midlands³ with 98, 97 and 77 more rough sleepers reported in the autumn series than the summer series respectively.

² A large part of the increase in the South West was a result of the increase in Cornwall from 12 to 65. This has been validated with the authority and they have confirmed it is due to the change in methodology which has allowed this large rural authority to use local intelligence to provide a more accurate estimate than could be achieved from street counts.

³ A large part of the increase in the West Midlands was a result of the increase in Herefordshire from 7 to 42. They have confirmed that this is due to the new guidance on providing an estimate allowing them to overcome the practical difficulties in obtaining a count – Their previous estimate was based upon a 2 year old street count.

Table 4 - Total of counts and estimates in summer and autumn 2010 by region

	Summer	Autumn	Difference between series:	
			Number	Percentage
North East	35	49	14	40%
North West	90	100	10	60%
Yorkshire and Humber	72	115	43	53%
East Midlands	108	121	13	12%
West Midlands	105	182	77	73%
East of England	169	206	37	22%
London	317	415	98	31%
South East	213	310	97	46%
South West	138	270	132	96%
England	1247	1768	521	42%

Source – DCLG Rough sleeping statistics

Comparison with CHAIN in London

The Combined Homelessness and information Network (CHAIN), run by homeless charity Broadway, contains information about people seen contacted by outreach teams and those who have accessed accommodation for rough sleepers in London. CHAIN data has been collected consistently over time. It records data on people seen by outreach teams rough sleeping in London. The table below shows the number of rough sleepers seen by outreach teams in London in each of the last 8 quarters. These figures are not comparable to the rough sleeping counts/estimates because they relate to contacts over a period of time rather than a single night snapshot. However they can be used to compare with the increases we have seen in London.

Table 5 – Number of rough sleepers seen by outreach workers in London in each quarter since 2009

2009				2010				Increase between Q4 2009 and Q4 2010	Increase between Q2 2010 and Q4 2010
Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
1171	1272	1441	1400	1178	1299	1549	1533	10%	18%

Source – CHAIN

There were 10% more rough sleepers contacted on CHAIN in Q4 2010 than the same quarter in the previous year. Whilst DCLG counts for the summer 2010 series could have been from any time between January 2009 and May 2010, estimates were made in June 2010. From the CHAIN data it appears that sightings of rough sleeping follow a seasonal pattern and that the October-December quarter tends to have more rough sleeper sightings than the April-June quarter. The CHAIN increase in the number of rough sleeper sightings between the second and fourth quarter of 2010 is 18 per cent. This may be a combination of seasonality and a real increase as the difference between the second and fourth quarter in CHAIN in 2009 was 10 per cent.

These increases are broadly comparable to the DCLG London figures from counts and estimates as the following table shows. Overall the London figure increased by 32 per cent compared to 10-18 per cent from CHAIN. This suggests that there are increases caused by the change in methodology as well as real increases in rough sleepers. In cases where the authority counted both times – the situation with the smallest methodological change – the CHAIN and count increases are quite similar.

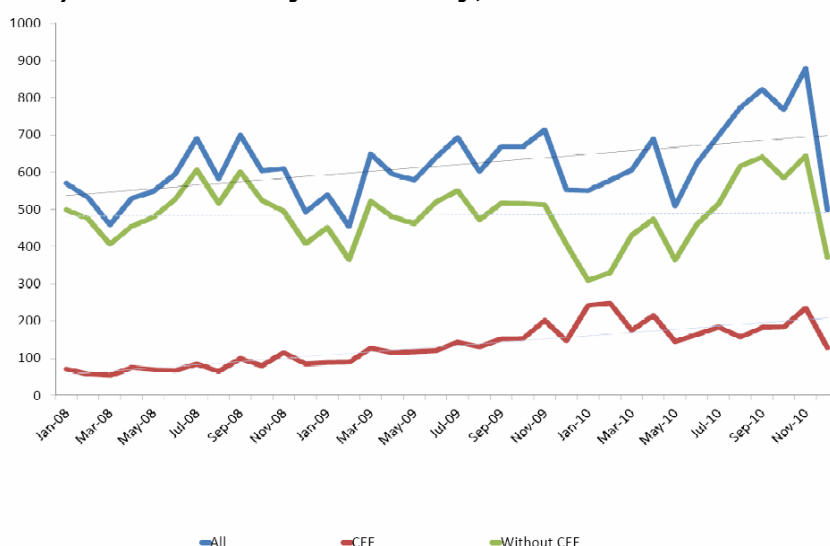
Table 6 – Total of counts and estimates in London in summer and autumn 2010 by method used by authorities in each set of figures

Method, Summer/Autumn	Number of LAs	Summer total	Autumn total	Difference between series:	
				Number	Percentage
Count/Count	10	219	254	35	16%
Count/Estimate	7	22	46	24	109%
Estimate/Count	2	6	8	2	33%
Estimate/Estimate	14	70	107	37	53%
All London LAs	33	317	415	98	32%

Source – DCLG Rough sleeping statistics

The CHAIN *Street to Home annual report 2009/10* highlights that recent rises in rough sleeping in London between 2008/09 and 2009/10 are accounted for by increases in rough sleeping by Central and Eastern European (CEE) nationals. Figure 2 below, replicated from the latest quarterly CHAIN publication, shows monthly sightings of rough sleepers by nationality. There has been a steady increase in sightings of rough sleepers from CEE countries. If rough sleepers from CEE countries are excluded from the figures however the number of people seen sleeping rough has been relatively stable over time.

Figure 2 – People seen rough sleeping by outreach or building based teams (BBS) each month by nationality, from CHAIN



Source – CHAIN, *Street to Home, Quarterly report, 1st October to 31st December 2010*: <http://www.broadwaylondon.org/CHAIN/NewsletterandReports>