

2020 Rough Sleeping Count/Estimates

As part of our commitment to regularly monitor and measure the extent of rough sleeping throughout Northern Ireland the Housing Executive has carried out snapshot estimates on an annual basis since 2018. Prior to 2018 the Housing Executive carried out snapshot estimates in areas where there was an identified need, which were primarily urban areas such as Belfast and Newry. The approach since 2018 has enabled the Housing Executive to publish information on rough sleeping across Northern Ireland as outlined in this update.

Rough Sleeper Street Counts

Due to impact of the ongoing pandemic the Housing Executive engaged with a range of partner agencies in order to identify areas in which a rough sleeper street count was required in 2020. As a result of this engagement it was agreed that a street count would take place in Belfast with estimates to take place across all other areas.

The methodology for the street counts is broadly similar to the process followed by Local Authorities in England and Wales and therefore consistent with data submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. During the street count rough sleepers were identified using the definition below:

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').

The rough sleeper street count took place in Belfast between 2am and 5am on the morning on Friday 27th November 2020.

Rough Sleeper Street Estimates

In areas where the need for a street count was not identified we used an estimate to identify the number of rough sleepers using consultation with our local partners. To gather data in areas where a street count did not take place we contacted local partners, including the PSNI, asking for the Housing Executive to be notified of any rough sleepers. As with the rough sleeper street counts this is again consistent with the approach taking in neighbouring jurisdictions such as England and Wales.

It is important to emphasise that the purpose of the estimate is to assess the numbers of people rough sleeping on the typical night chosen, rather than a larger sample of street activity, hidden homelessness or people using homelessness services. This means that, for example, a person who sometimes sleeps rough but sometimes has accommodation/shelter will not be included in the estimate unless there is evidence that they did sleep rough on that night.

The rough sleeper estimates on the night of Thursday 26th November leading in to the morning of Friday 27th November.

Headline Figures

A total of 18 people were estimated to be sleeping rough in Northern Ireland on the night of Thursday 26th November leading in to the morning of Friday 27th November. This represents a 50% decrease from the 2019 figure of 36.

The use of a methodology that is consistent with England and Wales enables a comparison to be made with neighbouring jurisdictions. When a direct comparison is made numbers of rough sleepers in Northern Ireland are substantially lower than the most recent figures provided where it was recorded that there were [2,688 rough sleepers in England](#) and [176 in Wales](#).

It should be noted that at the time of publication of this update the most recent figures for street counts/estimates in Wales were for 2019 and updated figures may reflect additional work to accommodate rough sleepers during the pandemic. The figures for Wales will be updated upon publication of figures for 2020. The Welsh Government has published more recent information on rough sleepers but, as per [this link](#), have noted 'we do not recommend comparisons between the rough sleeping estimates from this monthly collection and the annual rough sleeper count (up to November 2019).'

Rough sleeping by area

The table below outlines the number of rough sleepers by Local Government District (LGD).

Council	2018	2019	2020
Antrim & Newtownabbey	0	0	0
Ards & North Down	0	0	0
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	0	4	0
Belfast	16	28	10
Causeway Coast & Glens	4	0	0
Derry City & Strabane	13	1	2
Fermanagh & Omagh	0	1	0
Lisburn & Castlereagh	0	0	0
Mid & East Antrim	0	1	0
Mid Ulster	0	0	0
Newry, Mourne & Down	5	1	6
Total	38	36	18

Everyone In

As part of our response to the COVID-19 pandemic the Housing Executive, along with the Department of Health and Department for Communities adopted the 'Everyone In' approach. The 'Everyone In' approach sought to minimise the risk of those individuals, who were rough sleeping, contracting or spreading COVID-19. In conjunction with sector partners, including assertive outreach in Belfast, all identified rough sleepers were engaged with.

The 'Everyone In' approach included the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Department for Communities and Department of Health to assist those persons from abroad/ineligible for housing assistance who are rough sleeping. The 'Everyone In' approach has been a significant factor in the lower numbers of rough sleepers identified in 2020 and is reflective of partnership working with organisations such as Depaul, Extern and Welcome Organisation.

Key Documents

The following documents contain additional information relevant to the Housing Executive's work on homelessness.

[Chronic Homelessness Action Plan](#)

[The Way Home – Homelessness Response to COVID-19](#)

[Homelessness Strategy 2017-22](#)

[Homelessness Strategy Annual Progress Report](#)

As part of the Chronic Homelessness Action Plan the Housing Executive has committed to carrying out Street Needs Audits in Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and Newry. The most recent Street Needs Audit took place in Belfast in 2016 and further details can be found on [this link](#).