2021 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 counts/estimates on an annual basis since 2018. Prior to 2018 the Housing Executive carried out snapshot counts 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

The methodology for the street counts is broadly similar to the process followed by Local Authorities in England and is 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 counts took place on the following dates:

- Belfast - 2am on night of Wednesday 24th November leading in to morning of Thursday 24th November.
- Derry/Londonderry – 2am on night of Monday 22nd November leading in to morning of Tuesday 23rd November.
- Newry - 2am on night of Wednesday 17th November leading in to morning of Thursday 18th November.

Rough Sleeper Street Estimates

In areas where the need for a street count was not identified we used an evidence based 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 taken in England.

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 Monday 29th November leading in to the morning of Tuesday 30th November.
Headline Figures

A total of 23 people were estimated to be sleeping rough in Northern Ireland across the street counts/estimates outlined above. This represents a 27% increase from the 2020 figure of 18.

The use of a methodology that is consistent with England enables a comparison to be in respect of overall numbers. When a direct comparison is made numbers of rough sleepers in Northern Ireland are substantially lower than the most recent figures provided for England where it was noted that there were 2,440 people estimated to be sleeping rough on a single night in autumn 2021.

Previous updates provided by the Housing Executive provided a comparison with Wales but as annual rough sleeper counts no longer take place in Wales it is not recommended to make comparisons with Welsh figures which base provide figures based on estimates using local intelligence. Further details on rough sleeper data for other UK jurisdictions is contained within the links below:

- **England** – Rough sleeper counts/estimates using a similar methodology to Northern Ireland which enables a comparison to be made.
- **Scotland** – Rough sleeping data is provided via the number of households who at the point of application reported as rough sleeping the night before and in the previous 3 months.
- **Wales** – Since 2020 no rough sleeper counts have taken place and therefore no comparison can be made.

Rough sleeping by area

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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Council</th>
<th>2018</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
<th>2021</th>
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<tr>
<td>Antrim &amp; Newtownabbey</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>Ards &amp; North Down</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Newry, Mourne &amp; Down</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Key Documents

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

Homelessness Strategy 2022-27

Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 Year 1 Action Plan

Acknowledgements

The Housing Executive would like to note the assistance of Welcome Organisation (for Belfast and Newry) and First Housing Aid and Support Service (for Derry/Londonderry) in both the preparation and completion of each of the street counts. Additionally, the Housing Executive acknowledges the wide range of organisations who supported the completion of the estimates in all other areas.