



Women's Rough Sleeping Census

**Information session for
outreach services**

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**Eleanor Greenhalgh
Women's Rough Sleeping Policy Manager
Solace Women's Aid**

**Lucy Campbell
Head of Multiple Disadvantage Service Transformation
Single Homeless Project**

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**Why do we need
a women's rough
sleeping census?**





Rough sleepers are defined for the purposes of rough sleeping counts and estimates as:

- 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').

Bedded down is taken to mean either lying down or sleeping. About to bed down includes those who are sitting in/on or near a sleeping bag or other bedding.

The annual rough sleeping snapshot

records those people seen sleeping rough on a single night in Autumn each year.

The first time I
slept rough

was pp e
by u be o men



How have local authorities used their census data

- Subregional accommodation long-term accommodation service for women experiencing multiple disadvantage approved, funded and started due to data from census.
- Creating a shared house for women in response to census data highlighting their need.
- Additional local winter funds used to provide evening winter service for women.
- Included results in SHAP gap analysis and proposal for women-only accommodation - approved first stage so far.
- Received funding via RSI to deliver a weekly women's drop in, building on the multi-agency work of the census - now being delivered, and funding for therapeutic interventions.
- Funding received for evening drop in for women – campaigning for need for this project for number of years and census data provided final ingredient to get it approved.
- Role created and funded for dedicated women's support worker in housing support team.

**How does
the census
work?**



How does the census work?



1. Census survey:

- Outreach teams conduct the survey on gender-informed shifts
- Cross sector services conduct the survey with women they support
- Services come together to host women's census sessions in their borough (e.g. in day centres or at other key local hotspots)

2. Census Local Insights Meeting:

After census week, local services will come together in each borough to submit basic data about the number of women they work with/are aware of who are rough sleeping, and have a conversation about local challenges and possible ways forward.

Women's Rough Sleeping Census methodology

Challenge

Women are less likely to bed down visibly on the streets as they conceal themselves due to constant high risk of violence. This means they are often not seen in rough sleeping counts and not 'verified' as sleeping rough.

Women are even less visible to outreach at night as this is the most dangerous time for them. They will walk all night, sex work in flats or hotels, or accept high-risk offers of shelter from strangers from rather than face the streets at night.

Women's patterns of rough sleeping are transient and intermittent – meaning snapshot counts are highly likely to underrepresent them and traditional outreach shifts are unlikely to result in them being found and verified.

Women are often known to non outreach/housing services (health, Violence Against Women and Girls, substance use), but data is not shared between these sectors.

Rough sleeping provision has been designed for how men sleep rough. Understanding and recognition of how women sleep rough is limited.

Approach

Created guidance for outreach to direct them to look in places women and research tell us they shelter/sleep – stations, 24 hour cafes, hospital toilets and waiting rooms.

Outreach advised to conduct day shifts in order to find women they could never access at night.

Data collection window 7 days and women asked about experiences over the past 3 months. Survey to determine circumstances rather than needing to see the respondent in a particular place.

The census includes all services and sectors who support or encounter women who sleep rough, in order to build an inclusive data picture.

The census goes beyond counting and asks women questions to better understand their circumstances. We now have a body of data from over 800 women in England telling us how, when and where they sleep rough.

Gender informed definition of rough sleeping



Having nowhere safe to stay at all:

For example, sleeping outside on the ground or in a tent, sitting/sleeping in places which are open late or 24/7 (such as fast-food restaurants and hospitals), walking all night, sex working at night but not having anywhere to sleep during the day, using drugs in other people's accommodation at night but not having anywhere to sleep during the day, etc.

Women may not do this every night, and rough sleeping may be interspersed with other forms of hidden homelessness such as staying in accommodation belonging to unsafe/unknown people/perpetrators, staying in 'cuckooed' flats, or staying with friends/family/associates on a very insecure and transitory basis (e.g. nightly or weekly, or regularly being forced to leave immediately).

Census survey questions



- Short survey of about 10 questions to be completed with women. A few additional questions for practitioners (e.g. service type, location, date of survey completion).
- The survey questions include:
 - When they last slept rough and frequency of rough sleeping;
 - Where they have stayed/slept in the last three months;
 - Where they stayed prior to rough sleeping;
 - Services accessed;
 - Demographic questions.
- All questions are multiple choice (with free text option).
- The survey is an online form (with paper version for teams to print if needed.)

**What have we
learned from the
2022 and 2023
censuses?**



“ For three and a half years, I slept in woods, on buses, in hospitals... I was always having to hide because there was men trying to attack me. ”


Woman with lived experience of rough sleeping

“ We had to make such a concerted effort to change practice to reach women during the census week that it really highlighted we are not meeting the needs of women all year round. ”

Outreach Team Manager

“ Women's rough sleeping is often hidden, transient and intermittent...The current systems and processes used by local authorities and central government for establishing rough sleeping among women are not fit for purpose as they are designed for men who are rough sleeping. ”

'Making Women Count', Praxis Collab 2022



**What did the
2022 London
census tell us?**

Who took part in the 2023 census?

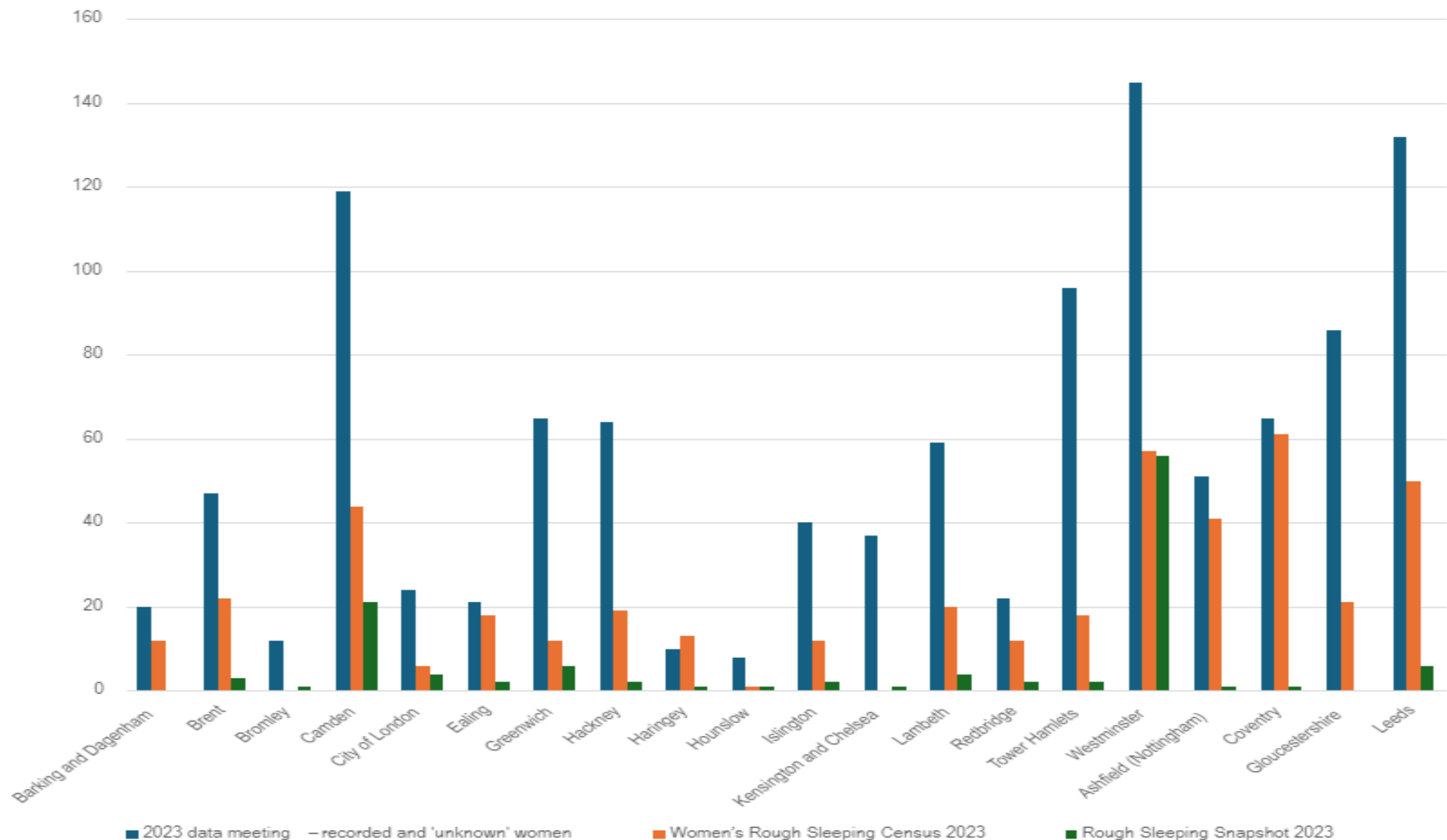
- The 2023 Women's Rough Sleeping Census took place across England between Monday 25th September and Sunday 1st October 2023.
- 27 London boroughs and 14 other local authorities (Greater Manchester, Coventry, Leeds, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole, Nottinghamshire, Gloucestershire, Cambridge City, Herefordshire) submitted survey responses.
- 17 London boroughs and five other local authorities participated in the additional census data review meetings.



What do the census data tell us? Survey

	2023 Government Rough Sleeping Snapshot	Gender-informed women's census
London	159	391
Greater Manchester	5	188
Gloucestershire	0	21
Coventry	1	61
National	189	815
England	568 (317 local authorities)	815 (41 local authorities)

Comparison of women's rough sleeping numbers



Emerging themes

Current identification and verification methods exclude many women who sleep rough

“ Similar to the 2022 London census, this reveals that women’s experiences of rough sleeping tend to be hidden, transient and intermittent, and that both the locations and the ways in which women sleep rough frequently fall outside of the Government definition of rough sleeping. This means that they are highly likely to be missed in the current snapshot counts used to enumerate rough sleeping... it also suggests that many women across England will not be identified as rough sleeping during normal outreach work ”

Emerging themes

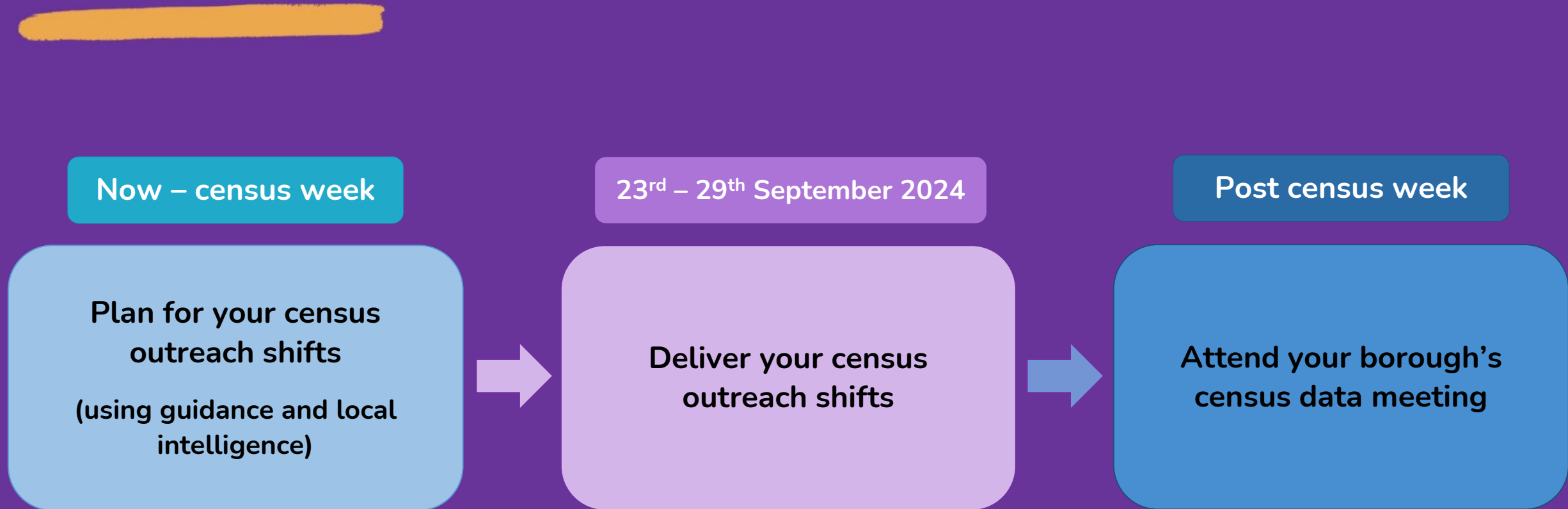
Women's homelessness is not being resolved by current approaches

“ A significant number of women reported that they had been experiencing homelessness in another form prior to rough sleeping, and a third (33%) of women reported that they had been in some form of homelessness accommodation prior to rough sleeping. This is of considerable concern, as it demonstrates that the accommodation offered to women to resolve their homelessness is either not sustainable or not suitable for their needs ”

How to take part: Planning your gender-informed outreach



What will outreach teams need to do?



Gender informed shifts: When



- Each borough should conduct a minimum of 6 hours of gender-informed outreach within census week. The shifts should allow enough time to cover all of the hotspots within the borough.
- Following consultation with practitioners and women with lived experience, we recommend the following shift times:
 - Between 6am and 9am
 - During the daytime
 - Between 9pm and 1am

Outreach teams may wish to use local intelligence to pick which shift times may be of particular benefit in your area. Where you are able to, testing shifts at each of these times would be beneficial.

Gender informed shifts: Where



Following consultation, our guidance outlines spaces where women are more likely to be seen, including:

- Quieter streets, estates and stairwells
- Parks/green spaces, graveyards, benches and car parks
- Inside train/tube/bus stations – particularly including toilets at night or in the early morning
- A&E waiting rooms, libraries, McDonald's/Burger King etc - including toilets
- Around day centres, hostels, health and other services (where women may not be living but may have reason to go to or be near)
- Inside freely accessible public spaces in which women can be inconspicuous and are unlikely to be asked to move on, for example shopping centres, arts centres.

Who to approach



- Women who are rough sleeping may not be physically bedded down when you see them, or at all.
- Professional judgement will be key in determining who to approach, and how to approach. Other than professional judgement and usual outreach practice, the following tips could be useful:
 - Women who are engaged in any form of street activity
 - Women in enclosed spaces such as train/tube stations, McDonalds, A&E waiting rooms, libraries etc. They may appear vulnerable, may not be using the services in the intended way, may have many belongings with them
 - Staff, security, police and PCSOs may be aware of women who may be experiencing homelessness in the area. (NB. women should not be approached to do the survey with any form of police involvement or presence, or with anyone in uniform).

Try this...

"Hello, we're outreach workers, how are you doing today? Is it ok if we speak to you? Thanks. We are hoping to speak to women who have recent experience of not having a safe place to stay. Is that something that you have experienced?"

We have some information that might help, and would also like to ask few questions for some research that's being done to help women experiencing homelessness. We won't ask anything identifying like your name or date of birth, and it's completely up to you if you want to take part or not. We are offering £5 vouchers for your time – the questions will take couple of minutes."

You may wish to avoid the term rough sleeping and it might be useful to describe some of the types of circumstances in the definition.

Different outreach teams



All services who deliver outreach are encouraged to deliver outreach during census week if.

- **Another kind of outreach:** If you aren't the commissioned rough sleeping team or deliver another kind of outreach, we suggest following the census guidance closely.
- **Women-specific outreach,** for example women's Housing First, sexual health vans, support for sex workers.
Your shifts are likely already designed to reach women. You may therefore want to deliver shifts during census week, but you may not need to make many changes in order to reach women.
- **If your service faces restrictions,** such as going out with a health van to particular locations at particular times, you might not be able to adapt your shift practices as much as the rough sleeping service. We encourage you to do what you can during census week to conduct the survey with women.

The survey



- Short survey of about 10 questions to be completed with women. A few additional questions for practitioners (e.g. service type, location, date of survey completion).
- The survey questions include:
 - When they last slept rough and frequency of rough sleeping;
 - Where they have stayed/slept in the last three months;
 - Where they stayed prior to rough sleeping;
 - Services accessed;
 - Demographic questions.
- All questions are multiple choice (with free text option).
- The survey is an online form (with paper version for teams to print if needed.)

The survey



- The questions are voluntary – women can answer as many or as few as they wish.
- Their answers will be anonymous and answering won't impact them in any way.
- Most areas will offer women a £5 supermarket voucher as a thank you.
- Don't worry if you're not sure if her experience fits within the definition: if she would like to do the survey, we will be able to understand her experience from her answers.
- The survey is for anyone who identifies as a woman and for people who identify as non-binary and feel the survey's gender themes are relevant to their experiences.
- Written explanation of the research is provided to give to respondents. This includes assurances about how their data will be used, privacy, and the voluntary nature of questions.

Gender informed outreach: Who



- Census outreach should be done in pairs, including outreach staff from the borough with a volunteer if necessary.
- Men outreach workers/volunteers must be paired with a woman outreach worker or volunteer.
- Volunteers will be arranged by area/combined authority. If you are likely to need volunteers, contact your local census organiser as soon as possible to see if they can support with this.
- All those taking part must have attended this training or watched a recorded session and read the guidance.

**Making every
contact count**



Making every contact count: Info sheet



- Any contact is a vital opportunity to connect women with support, information and resources, or build on an existing relationship. Offer an information sheet with local service information to women you meet.
 - Your service information if they wish to contact you at a later date
 - Opening times, locations and contact details to relevant local services, e.g. women's services, day centres, drug and alcohol services, health services, immigration advice services.
 - Local Housing Options department information, StreetLink self-referral information
 - Helpline and non-emergency numbers, e.g. National Domestic Abuse Helpline, Samaritans, Police non-emergency, NHS 111
 - Crisis team contact number (borough specific) and mental health support
- All workers should be equipped with information on how to refer into any emergency safe spaces, e.g. night shelters, respite rooms, and should be familiar with local VAWG services.
- Each outreach team should follow usual policies and procedures with respect to safeguarding concerns and other emergency situations (including women who are pregnant, at immediate risk, or under 18).
- Outreach teams should make use of telephone translators where needed/possible.

Trauma informed outreach approach

Open and clear about your purpose

Enable choice and control: "Is now an ok time to talk?"

Be aware of your body language. Give space. Offer choice: "Is it ok if I sit here?"

Be prepared to respond to disclosures of trauma/abuse

Be mindful that the person might be with a perpetrator/be being watched by a perpetrator

Avoid re-traumatisation/no unnecessary questions and don't push for answers

Have information ready and offer help and advice

Check in with your partner; have a safe word, debrief after shift

Safety



- Women under 18 should not be included in this survey: if you meet a woman under 18 and are concerned she is rough sleeping or at other high risk, follow usual safeguarding procedures.
- If you meet a woman who is pregnant and rough sleeping, please again follow usual safeguarding and support procedures. She can be included on the survey, but her safety is paramount.
- Women in very poor health may need urgent support. Please contact your local health teams, as well as emergency services as required.
- For women who are in immediate danger or risk of harm, discuss some basic safety planning with her (see next slide) or contact support/emergency services if she is willing to do so.
- If you witness a woman being abused or assaulted or at any point feel like you are at risk, remove yourself from the situation immediately and call 999 or 101, depending on the immediacy of the risk.

Basic safety planning

- If you are concerned that a woman at risk but it is not an emergency, try some basic safety planning, including:
 - Identify and validate existing strategies she is using to manage her safety.
 - Is there anywhere she can go to feel safer?
 - Does she know where to go/who to call to access help and support if she needs to?
 - Identify safe spaces the client can go to if she feels unsafe (and consider a range of options), women's only services, drop in centres/services, day centres, No Second Night Out assessment centre, libraries, 24hr establishments, A&E.
 - Can you support her to get to a safe place?
 - Can you offer anything practical to increase her safety e.g. food, water, mobile phone, phone credit, personal alarm?
 - Does she want to report to the police?
 - Is there anyone she wants you to contact?
- [Guidance for safety planning with women experiencing multiple disadvantage - Keeping us Safer](#)
- [Guidance on working with survivors and perpetrators of domestic abuse in homelessness settings](#)
- [Safety advice for sex workers in the UK](#)

How to take part: Local Insights Meetings



What is the Census Local Insights Meeting?



- Formerly the data meeting!
- Services in each area/borough come together to share numbers of women they are working with who they know to be rough sleeping, and experiences and challenges in supporting women experiencing rough sleeping.
- The data meeting draws on knowledge of local services to provide a more accurate and inclusive estimate of women known to be in this situation, including those not visible during census week, whereas the census survey allows us to hear from women themselves.

Local Insights Meeting: Before



- Compile a list of women your service is working with/aware of prior to the meeting:
 - Include women who have worked with/been known to your service in the last three months (July to September 2023), who you know have experienced rough sleeping **according to the census definition** at any point within the last three months.
 - Include initials and date or year of birth if you can.
- If your service does not record case management information or cannot share it, simply note the total number of women who meet the criteria.
- You can also include women you are aware of, but don't have details for.

Local Insights Meeting: How will it work?



- At the meeting, the organiser will address each service in turn and will ask for the number of women they have worked with who meet the census criteria.
- The organizer/lead will facilitate checking for shared cases between services.
- Any confirmed shared cases will be noted as duplicates, so that the meeting organiser can calculate an accurate number of women rough sleeping in the borough.
- Once all figures have been shared, the meeting organiser will facilitate a conversation within the meeting about the particular experiences and needs of women who are rough sleeping within the borough, and any learnings from conducting the census.

We know that not all services will be able to share their data in this way: we encourage you to still attend the meeting as your input into the discussions is very valuable.

What's next? Action plan



- Plan your shifts with your team and get local intelligence from other services about hotspots.
- Make sure you and your team read the 2024 census guidance (on the census webpage)
- Find out who your LA census lead is and get in touch to say your team will be participating in the census.
- Find out when the Local Insights meeting will take place and start to collate data July - September.
- Contact your local organisers about volunteers and vouchers.
- Create or access information sheets for your local area and create care packs if possible.
- Conduct your gender-informed outreach shift!
- Make sure all surveys are submitted online by 2nd October.



Any questions?

Get in touch:

e.greenhalgh@solacewomensaid.org

Lcampbell@shp.org.uk

Womens.census@solacewomensaid.org

www.solacewomensaid.org/womens-rough-sleeping-census