



# Women's Rough Sleeping Census:

Information session for  
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

# Contents

A person is walking away from the camera down a long, brightly lit hallway. The hallway has a curved wall on the right side and a grid ceiling. The lighting is warm and yellow, creating a modern and clean atmosphere. The person is wearing a dark jacket and pants, and their shadow is cast on the floor. The hallway appears to be part of a large building, possibly a government or institutional structure.

1. Why do we need a women's rough sleeping census?
2. How does the census work?
3. What have we learned from the 2022 and 2023 censuses?
4. How to take part this year:  
Planning how your service can be involved
5. How to take part in Census Local Insight Meetings
6. What's next – action planning!

**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:

- 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)
- Outreach teams conduct the survey on gender-informed shifts

## 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?**



A person is walking away from the camera down a dark, narrow tunnel. The tunnel has concrete walls and a ceiling with some water stains. At the end of the tunnel, there is a bright light source, creating a silhouette of the person walking towards it. The overall mood is somber and isolated.

“ 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?

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- 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.

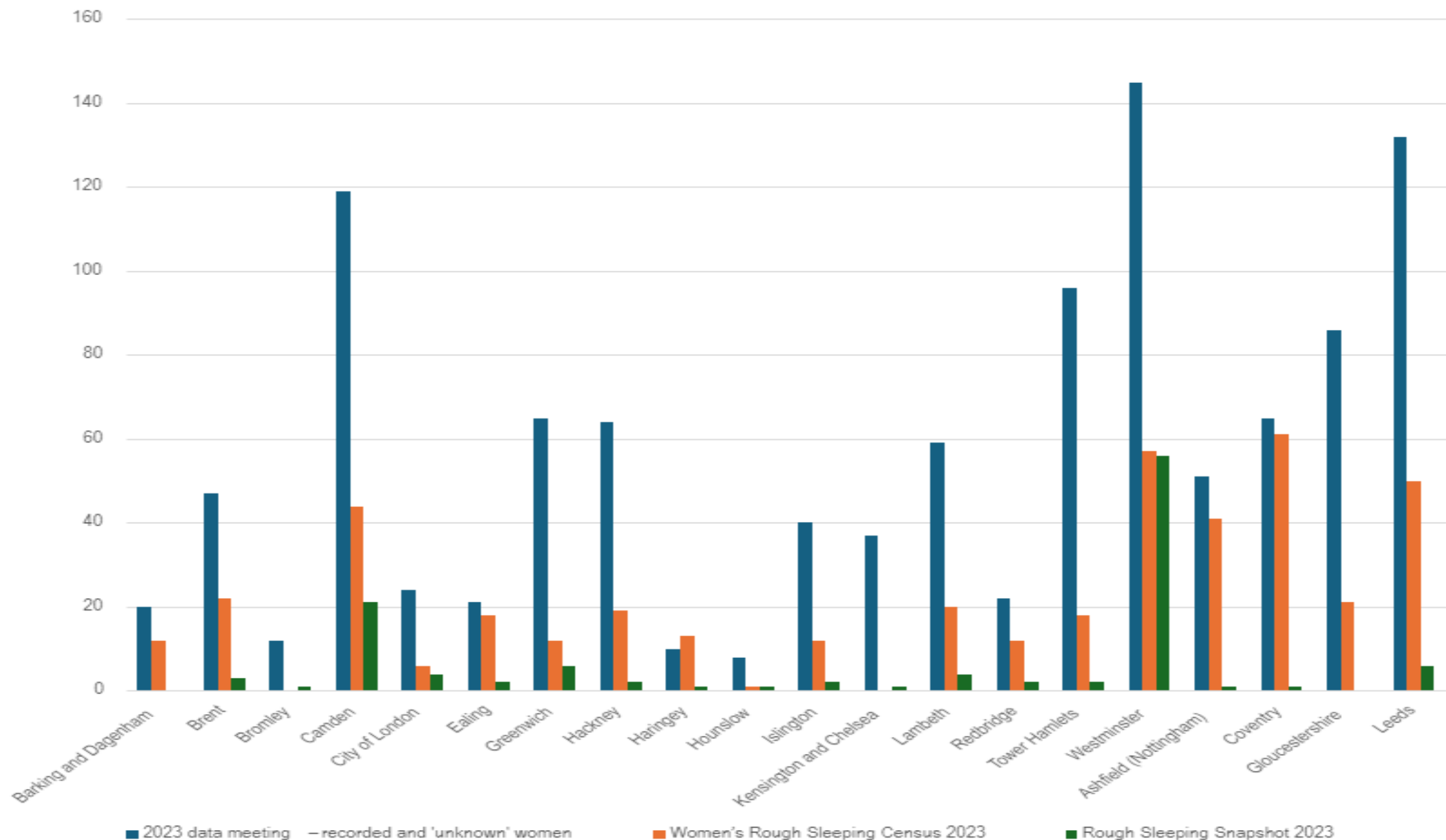


# What do the census data tell us? Survey

	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 service's involvement



# What will services need to do?

**Now – census week**

Prepare your census week involvement, including any day centre or hotspot sessions.

Gather data for Local Insights Meeting on women seen during July – September.

**23rd -29th September**

Conduct the survey with women during census week and

**Post census week**

Attend your borough's Local Insights Meeting



# Which services can take part?



- Any service in that supports or encounters women who may be experiencing homelessness and rough sleeping.
- This includes homelessness support services, day centres, VAWG and women's services, health teams, drug and alcohol services, community groups including faith groups and food banks, migrant support services, etc.
- If your service sometimes works with or is open to women who experience homelessness, it's likely that some of the women you work with might be rough sleeping according to the census definition, and can be included in the census. If in doubt – offer the woman the opportunity, it will become clear through answering the questions whether her experiences are concurrent with the census definition.

# Why do we need services to take part?



- Women's rough sleeping is often hidden, meaning women are less likely than men to be found by homelessness outreach services.
- They may however be accessing other types of services - GP, hospital, substance use, women's services, migrant services, community services, food banks, etc.
- Taking a cross-sector approach will enable us to reach more women, and give us a more accurate and inclusive data picture which takes into account women's varied circumstances.
- The census can also be a springboard for better partnership work going forward, and the development of cross sector pathways to respond more responsively to women's homelessness.

# When should you do the survey?



- Throughout census week at the end of September – see the census webpage for this year's dates.
- With women accessing the service during the week, in person or by phone.
- During the service's usual opening times.
- If your service is unlikely to have capacity to do the survey with women, please **get in touch with your local census lead** – it may be possible to co-locate a volunteer at your service for a shift during census week.
- If your service is based in a building that women can drop into and could host a 'census day' in your area, please let your census lead know.



# Day centre or hotspot 'census sessions'



You might deliver or know of services, day centres or hotspots in your area which might be well-attended by women and could be good places to conduct the survey.

## In your service

You could work with other services and the census lead to arrange a 'census session' or day in your day centre/building/service.

- You could host a women's day and arrange for in-reach services to attend – such as health, wellbeing or domestic abuse practitioners.
- You could take the opportunity to encourage women to attend your service and link up with local services who can encourage women they work with to attend.
- You might have a busy service e.g. health centre, and meet many women, but are unable to complete the surveys with them – you could choose a day to host a census session with volunteer support.

# Day centre or hotspot 'census sessions'



## Hotspot areas:

You might also know of other areas or services in your area which women are likely to attend – they could be allocated as hotspot areas with volunteers provided to complete the census survey with women. For example, a busy homeless health service, A&E, train station.

If so, let your census lead know.

## Vouchers and volunteers

The census lead/leads in your area may be able to provide £5 to give to women to say thank you for completing the survey, and may be able to provide volunteers to come to your service and help to conduct the survey during census week. Get in contact with them to enquire.

# Who should you ask to take part in the survey?



- The survey is for all women who have slept rough in the last 3 months (using the gender informed definition of rough sleeping).
- The survey is for anyone who identifies as a woman and people who identify as non-binary and feel the study's gender themes are relevant to their experiences.
- Professional judgement will be key in determining who to approach and how to approach (ensuring that the approach is appropriate, sensitive to a woman's circumstances and not perceived as intrusive).
- You may be aware of some women's housing circumstances, but if a woman is new to your service, it may not be clear what their circumstances are.
- Depending on the service, workers may wish to enquire more gently about a woman's circumstances before introducing the census and offering to complete the survey with them, for example 'Do you have a safe place to stay at night?'

# Try this....



*"Hello, how are you doing today? We're taking part in research to try and help women who are experiencing homelessness. 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 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. The questions will take a couple of minutes."*

# The census survey



- Short survey of 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 are being finalised and are likely to include:
  - When they last slept rough and frequency of rough sleeping;
  - Where they stayed the previous night;
  - 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.)

# How to complete the survey with women



- 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.
- 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.

# How to complete the survey with women



- The surveys should be completed in real time on the online survey platform, or if completing on paper, filled in online immediately after the interaction.
- The survey should be conducted with respondents, rather than sending on the survey link to potential respondents. This is important to ensure consistency of data collection and minimise double counting, and allows practitioners to complete additional questions for the service.
- We suggest appointing a single point of contact for your service to ensure all teams and staff have the relevant information. Services may also wish to nominate a particular member of staff or volunteer to conduct the survey.
- All those conducting the survey should have read the guidance.



**Any questions about  
the census survey?**



**Making every  
contact count**



# Making every contact count: further support for women



- Some women may require additional support or signposting, or unknown risks may become apparent to services.
- Services should follow any usual procedures in providing information, advice and support.
- Support may involve completing referrals to other services, using Duty to Refer processes, carrying out safeguarding practices, safety planning, or other forms of support, with consent as required.
- Services should follow usual safeguarding procedures for anyone at high risk, which women should be informed about.
- Make use of telephone translators where possible.

# Making every contact count: further support for women



- Services could also consider where they may be able to take further action to support service users within their role, perhaps through working closely with other agencies.
- For signposting purposes, services should use existing local knowledge, and a services information template can also be downloaded from the census webpage for services to fill in.
- Practitioners should also familiarise themselves with any local women's services and safety planning techniques, safeguarding responses and service contacts should they encounter disclosure of risk, abuse or assault.

# 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 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).

*“I remember when I was coming off the street when I was finally ready to ask for help, I had no idea what I was doing. I absolutely had no knowledge of where to go, what to do. And it was only by other people's help that I managed to sort of kind of piece it together, but I needed so much support along the way.”*

# 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  
this year:  
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: Preparation



- All services should compile a list of women they are 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 2024), who you know have experienced rough sleeping **according to the census definition** at any point within the last three months.
- If your service regularly records case management data about the women you work with (e.g. name, date of birth), create a list of women who you work with who meet the criteria. Your list should include only initials and year of birth for each woman.
- If your service does not record case management information, simply note the total number of women who meet the criteria.

# 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



1. Tell the census organiser/s in your area that you will be participating in the census.
2. Read the census guidance for services and share with your team/other services.
3. Let your census organiser/s know your volunteering needs - they may be able to co-locate a volunteer at your service.
4. Nominate people in your service to coordinate completion of the survey with women during census week.
5. Conduct surveys with women who access your service during census week! Make sure all surveys are submitted at the time of filling in/by 2nd October.
6. Compile a list of women who have accessed your service July - September 2024 inclusive (who you know to be rough sleeping according to the census definition) for the Local Insights Meeting. One person from your service to attend the Local Insights Meeting.



Any questions?

Get in touch:

[e.greenhalgh@solacewomensaid.org](mailto:e.greenhalgh@solacewomensaid.org)

[Lcampbell@shp.org.uk](mailto:Lcampbell@shp.org.uk)

[Womens.census@solacewomensaid.org](mailto:Womens.census@solacewomensaid.org)

[www.solacewomensaid.org/womens-rough-sleeping-census](http://www.solacewomensaid.org/womens-rough-sleeping-census)