

## Women's Rough Sleeping Census – Oxfordshire 2024

### Census reveals women's rough sleeping more than double official figure

36 women in Oxfordshire were found to have experienced rough sleeping in the three months to September, more than double the 14 reported in the most recent government Snapshot. A further 28 women were reported to be rough sleeping but were not captured in the census.

### Why do the census?

Early in 2024 a group comprising voluntary organisations, service providers and councils met to discuss improving services for women rough sleepers in the county. They decided to participate in the Women's Rough Sleeping Census ([WRSC](#)) which is coordinated by Solace Women's Aid and the Single Homelessness Project, and has been run annually in London and several other cities/counties for 3 years.

Prior to conducting the census, the only public data point for the county was the annual snapshot collected for DLUHC. This showed a total of 14 female rough sleepers in the county in 2023. The group conclude that this was an inadequate base to inform how to improve services for women. In Oxfordshire, the census was coordinated by OHM with the support of the County Council and participation of more than 20 voluntary/service organisations. The census comprises two methods for assessing the number of women experiencing rough sleeping in the last 3 months: a survey deployed through outreach workers and support organisations (e.g. addiction services, health centres, drop-in centres), and a pooling of data on women working with services. These are described more fully in the methodology section below. Fieldwork took place in the week of 23<sup>rd</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> September.

### A clearer view of the scale of rough sleeping

The survey counted 36 women who had experienced rough sleeping within the last 3 months. So more than double the Snapshot. The data pooling exercise counted 39 women in touch with services. In addition, a further 28 women were reported to be rough sleeping but could not be identified. Therefore, the total number could be as high as 67 women. The census has given a more accurate view of the scale of rough sleeping but is probably also an underestimate of the true extent.

The survey gave us some more information about the women:

- Most are sleeping rough extensively: 20 have spent more than 11 nights out in the last 3 months.
- For about half, the experience is recent: last night or last week.
- Age range from 19 to 62. 10 under 30, 10 in their thirties, 8 in the forties and 6 are 50 or older (2 not saying).
- Most describe themselves as white/white British = 28
- Prior to rough sleeping: sofa surfing and supported housing accounts for half.
- Wide variety of places used for rough sleeping.
- Variety of reasons for leaving last accommodation but some kind of issue with safety/other residents is common.

The involvement of the councils in the process had the additional benefit of getting better access to the Ending Rough Sleeping Framework Data collected by the councils for the ministry. These data are collected by gender but published in total and in arrears (the data on the government dashboard has just been updated to June 2024). We were able to access data for women up to the end of September 2024, which shows:

|  | Ending Rough Sleeping Framework |          |
|--|---------------------------------|----------|
|  | Year to Aug 2024                | JAS 2024 |
| Sleeping Rough in the period           | 70                              | 26       |
| New to rough sleeping in the period    | 34                              | 15       |
| Known to have been rough sleeping 5ys+ | 16                              | 6        |

The number of 26 sleeping rough in the 3 months to September 2024 is still lower than the census figure, but it is closer than the snapshot. The monthly frequency of collection and the breakdown of long term and new rough sleepers point to the value of this data if published promptly and made accessible to those who can act on it.

### **A deeper view**

The census has given us a clearer picture of the scale of rough sleeping among women and a high-level view of their characteristics. We commissioned LEAF to conduct qualitative research to help us understand their lives in more depth and how services are working, or not, for them. LEAF conducted 11 in-depth interviews with women experiencing rough sleeping in the last 3 months. The report from this research is being finalised and will be available in the week of 4<sup>th</sup> November.

### **What's next?**

Together, the census and the LEAF research will give us a much stronger basis to understand where there are gaps in services and how to improve them. We will use the research to inform workshops to identify improvements and develop action plans. We expected to use the data/evidence to support funding cases to enable the actions to be implemented.

### **Methodology**

#### **1. Census survey**

A short survey to be completed with women who have recently experienced rough sleeping.

This helps us to hear directly from women themselves about their experiences.

Answers to the survey are gathered in three main ways, including:

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

#### **2. Local Insights Meeting (formerly data meeting)**

After census week, local services come together in each borough to submit basic data about the number of women they work with who are rough sleeping. This can help us get an anonymised, representative picture of women rough sleeping in each area.

The following definition for rough sleeping was used. This reflects the hidden, transient, and intermittent character of women's experience:

*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).*