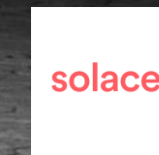


The Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2025

Training for outreach services

Wednesday 9th July 2025



Single
Homeless
Project

**STANDING
TOGETHER**
against domestic abuse

**LONDON
COUNCILS**

Agenda

1. Why do we need a women's rough sleeping census?
2. Why should you take part?
3. What have we learned from previous years?
4. How to take part this year: Planning your gender informed outreach
5. Safety
6. How to take part in Census Local Insight meetings
7. 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.

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



Why should you take part?



Be part of a growing movement for change

2022



2024



The census has collected the biggest data set in Europe on women's experiences of sleeping rough. More than 2000 women have been reached since the census pilot in 2022.

Their voices are being used to shape changes locally and nationally.



ITV's We Can End Homelessness: 4 women share their experiences of homelessness and working in the sector

Kicked, urinated on, tents set on fire - we reveal the realities for female rough sleepers in the UK

Our new investigation looks at the reality of life, and the untold stories, of female rough sleepers

Government accused of neglecting women rough sleepers by dramatically undercounting them

Exclusive: 'You have to be visible to get the help but you also need to be invisible to keep safe' - rough sleeper says

Maya Oppenheim Women's Correspondent • Tuesday 07 May 2024 10:13 BST
9 Comments

INSIDE HOUSING

Up to nine times more women sleeping rough than government statistics say, research suggests

NEWS 07.05.24 BY ALEX TURNER

Nine times more women may be sleeping rough in England than are recorded by official rough sleeping statistics, study.

Islington Tribune
Not in the stats, women are left unseen in city's homelessness

SW Londoner

HOME NEWS SPORT LIFE ENTERTAINMENT FOOD & DRINK EDITOR'S PICKS

Homeless women underrepresented in numbers, data suggests

28 November 2024 Kasia Filisiuk Follow @SW_Lond

Homeless women are significantly underrepresented in the 2023 Women's Rough Sleeping Census, according to figures from the charity.

The 2023 Women's Rough Sleeping Census suggests that the number of women sleeping across England is significantly underreported in official government statistics.

'Women experiencing homelessness face an awful choice tonight - here's how we can help'

Lucy Campbell, Head of Multiple Disadvantage at the Single Homeless Project charity, makes the case for change and warns there will be women facing an awful choice tonight

OPINION By Lucy Campbell
18:05, 14 Dec 2024 | UPDATED 19:28, 14 DEC 2024

Mirror

SUNDAY Mirror THE HEART OF BRITAIN Sunday, December 15, 2024 £2.60

SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

HIDDEN SCANDAL OF HOMELESS WOMEN

Rough sleepers are double official figures

EXCLUSIVE BY SIMON MURPHY
OVER a thousand women have been found sleeping rough by charity workers - nearly twice as many as government figures admit. Today we shine a light on the hidden homeless who keep a low profile to avoid predators. One, Lacey Post, told how she tried to stay safe on the streets but was raped aged 17. FULL STORY: PAGES 4&5



ATTACKED Lacey was raped while homeless



itvX

EXCLUSIVE

Up to 9 times more women rough sleeping in England than government statistics suggest, report says

TYNE TEES | WOMEN | HOME

Kris Jepson Correspondent, ITV News

BIG ISSUE

Pioneering census sheds light on hidden reality of women's homelessness

There could be more than 5,000 women sleeping rough in England. We must find them

Last week 47 charities, networks and local authorities wrote to Angela Rayner calling for the government to step up efforts to help homeless women. Here's why it's vital to ending homelessness for good

LIZ RUTHERFOORD, NAHAR CHOUDHURY | 6 Sep 2024

We must recognise homeless women in their own right, and fund services accordingly

INSIDE HOUSING



Improve provision in your area

“Women’s homelessness is firmly on the agenda, senior decision makers who previously were dismissive of women’s needs are now advocating for the needs of women across commissioning and service delivery.”

“The women’s census has resulted in the development of a women’s only accommodation service. Women clients have been more responsive to the bespoke offer for women, and clients that have struggled to sustain accommodation have responded well to the new approach, and are not just sustaining their accommodation but are thriving!”

Improve provision in your area

“We used the census data to successfully apply for funding for a new Respite Rooms style service for women, as well as a women's only SWEP provision.”

“We are showing we believe women, and will put interventions in place as soon as they need them.”

What have we learned from previous years?



What have we learned? Data

	Number of women recorded in 2024 Government Rough Sleeping Snapshot	Number of women recorded in 2024 Women's Rough Sleeping Census Survey	Number of women recorded in 2024 Census Local Insights meetings
London	186	371	578 (19/33 boroughs)
Greater Manchester	17	180	116 (7/10 local authorities)
Sheffield	8	17	104
Bristol	15	66	349
Hertfordshire	5	29	107
Coventry	2	36	84
Leeds	6	66	N/A
All census areas (88 local authorities)	337	1,014	1,777 (37 local authorities)
All Local Insights areas (37 local authorities)	166	631	1,777 (37 local authorities)
Whole of England	680 (296 local authorities)	1,014 (88 local authorities)	1,777 (37 local authorities)

What have we learned?



Women's rough sleeping is hidden, transient and intermittent – 54% in 2024 reported sleeping in places not within the existing definition.

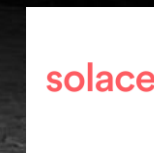


Services aren't reaching women – 77% not in touch with housing officer or council housing department, 43% not in touch with homelessness service.



Accommodation isn't preventing homelessness for women – 37% were in homelessness accommodation prior to rough sleeping.

How does the census work?



How does the census work?

The census uses a two part, gender-informed methodology, developed by researchers, women with lived experience and cross sector organisations:

- ➡ **Census survey:** 1. Outreach teams conduct the survey on gender-informed shifts 2. Cross sector services conduct the survey with women they support 3. Services come together to host women's census sessions in their borough (e.g. in day centres or at other key local hotspots).
- ➡ **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.

How does the women's rough sleeping census work?

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

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

Outreach advised to conduct day shifts in order to find women they could never access at night, and services that women access in the day can also do the census survey.

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

After the census survey week, each LA holds a 'Local Insights' meeting, bringing together data from all services and sectors who support or encounter women who sleep rough.

The census goes beyond counting and asks women questions to better understand their circumstances, and every interaction is an opportunity to link women in to support. We now have a body of data from over 2000 women across 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)."

The census survey

- Short survey of 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 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.)

Planning your gender informed outreach



Outreach: When

- The census this year is Monday 22nd September - Sunday 28th September (inclusive) 2024
- Each borough to conduct a minimum of 6 hours of gender-informed outreach within census week.
- These six hours should cover hotspots across the local authority area. If outreach teams have capacity to do additional hours of gender-informed outreach across the census week, we encourage you to do so. You can also do the survey on routine outreach shifts (homelessness, sexual health, etc).
- Following consultation with outreach teams and other specialist services, as well as women with lived experience, we recommend that shifts are conducted during the following times:
 - between 6am and 9am (to reach women as they are waking up or moving on);
 - during the daytime (to reach women who might be using spaces open in the daytime, such as libraries);
 - between 9pm and 1am (to reach women who might be moving or bedding down as retail outlets close).
- Outreach teams may not be able to cover all of these times, but may wish to use local intelligence to inform which shifts may be of particular benefit in your area.

Outreach: Where

- Quieter streets, housing estates, stairwells, abandoned buildings if safe to look in
- Parks/green spaces, graveyards, wooded areas, benches
- Gated garden squares
- Car parks, including underground or multi-storey car parks
- Restaurant and shop doorways
- Inside train/tube/bus stations – particularly including toilets at night or in the early morning
- A&E waiting rooms – particularly including toilets
- Libraries
- McDonald's/Burger King etc - including toilets
- In shop and restaurant doorways, particularly just before opening or after closing
- Around soup kitchens/inside churches or other places of worship
- Around homeless health services – GPs, mental health drop in, substance use drop ins
- Around day centres and hostels (where women may not be living but may have reason to go to or be near)
- Inside/around Housing Options departments where women may present
- Inside freely accessible public spaces in which women can be inconspicuous and are unlikely to be asked to move on.

Outreach: How

- Women who are rough sleeping may not be physically bedded down in a sleeping bag when workers see them
- Professional judgement will be key in determining who to approach, and also how to approach (ensuring that the approach is appropriate, sensitive to a woman's circumstances and not perceived as intrusive). Other than professional judgement, and approaching women who are bedded down, about to bed down or sitting/standing next to bedding (as per a usual shift), the following tips could be useful in knowing who to approach:
- Women who are engaged in any form of street activity i.e. begging
- Women in enclosed spaces such as train/tube stations, McDonalds, A&E waiting rooms, libraries etc. who appear to be vulnerable and/or may not be using the services in the intended way but may be sheltering there, and/or may have a number of belongings with them.
- If workers observe patrolling police/security staff, ask them whether they are aware of any women who appear vulnerable/may be experiencing homelessness in the area. Professional judgement should always be used when working with the police, and this suggestion is for local intel purposes on women's locations only: 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 in the past few months?"*
- *"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 £10 vouchers for your time – the questions will take couple of minutes."*

Outreach: Who

- All outreach should be done in twos. Outreach shifts will be undertaken by outreach staff from each borough, paired with a volunteer if necessary.
- Men outreach workers/volunteers must be paired with a woman outreach worker or volunteer. All workers and volunteers taking part in the census must have attended this training or watched a recorded session and read the accompanying guidance prior to undertaking a shift.
- The census team may be able to provide volunteers for London boroughs – get in touch as soon as possible if you are likely to need volunteers. In national areas, let your census lead/leads for your area know ASAP if you will need volunteer support to undertake the census shifts.

The survey

- Online survey platform, easy to access on tablet or smartphone, printed versions available if preferred.
- Written explanation of research provided, including assurances about privacy and voluntary nature of questions.
- Women will be offered a £10 supermarket voucher for their time.
- The survey questions are being finalised, and are likely to include the following themes: Where they stayed the previous night; Duration and frequency of homelessness; Services they are accessing; Whether they have already been asked these questions by someone else this week.

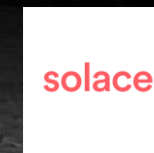
Demographic questions such as ethnicity, gender, age on last birthday (this will not record DOB).

- Survey for anyone who identifies as a woman and those who identify as non-binary and feel the study's gender themes are relevant to their experiences.

Making every contact count

- Your service information if they wish to contact you at a later date
- Contact details and map to local day centre/advice service
- Opening times and locations of any local women's spaces
- StreetLink self-referral information
- Local Housing Options department information
- Local VAWG and women's services, including domestic abuse support service, local Rape Crisis service, and Ascent advice helpline for the area (Solace or Women and Girls Network)
- Immigration advice service information
- Welfare benefits contact information
- Useful numbers to call – National Domestic Abuse helpline, Samaritans, Police non-emergency, NHS 111
- Crisis team contact number (borough specific)
- Mental health support via text message details (text SHOUT to 85258 free confidential 24/7 messaging mental health support service)
- All workers should be equipped with information on how to refer into any emergency safe spaces that are available to their borough, e.g. night shelters or respite rooms.
- Each outreach team should follow their 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 (such as LanguageLine) where needed to make sure that all women are able to fully participate in this survey.

Safety

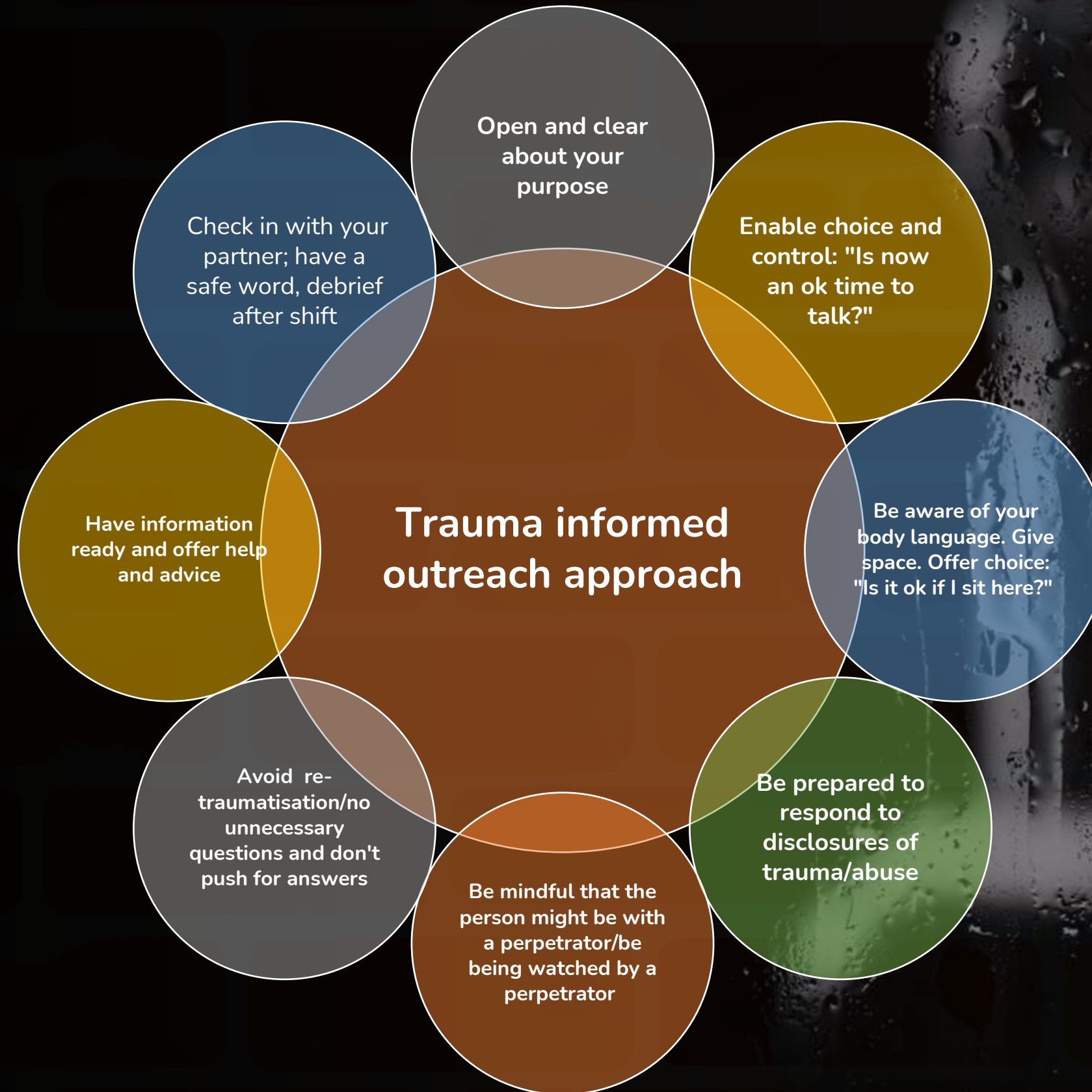


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Trauma informed outreach



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.**

Safety

- 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, 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?
- Can your area provide emergency accommodation options with quick referral routes this week?
- 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](#)

A woman is shown in profile on the left side of the image, looking downwards. She is wearing a dark-colored top. The background is a dark brick wall. The text 'Local Insights meetings' is positioned on the right side of the image, with a red underline beneath it.

Local Insights meetings

Local Insights meetings: Planning

- **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 2023), 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 meetings: What happens?

- **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 service should then list the initials of each woman they work with.**
- **If you think your service may also have worked with that woman, you should raise this with the meeting organiser, and you and the service can check whether this is a shared case.**
- **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.**



What next?



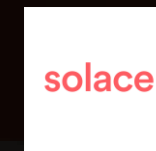
What next? Action plan!

- Plan your shifts with your team, get local intelligence from other services about hotspots.
- Make sure you and your team read the 2024 census guidance (add link)
- 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.
- For London areas, let us know your volunteering needs and if you would like to have vouchers.
- For London areas, get in touch if you need volunteers.
- Create local authority-specific info sheets and create care packs if possible.
- Conduct your gender-informed outreach shift!
- Fill in the recording form about your census shifts and make sure all surveys are submitted at the time of filling in/before the 1st October 12 midnight.
- Compile a list of women your service has worked with July – September 2024 for the local insights meeting. One person from your service to attend the meeting.

Questions



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