**DCLG Rough Sleeping Statistics Roundtable**

**Manchester Central Library, 3 November 2016**

**Attendees:**

Mike Young, homelessness statistics, DCLG

Laura Furness, Big Lottery Fund

Tim Gray, Brent

Peter Mackie, Cardiff University

Sharon Brown, Centrepoint

Francesca Albanese, Crisis

Lee Buss, Evolve Housing

Matt Harrison, Homeless Link

Helen Dudszinka, Homeless Link

Peter Smith, Homeless Link

Debra Bowen, Homeless Link

David Pugh, Liverpool YMCA

Alix Watson, Liverpool

Felicity Meerloo, Local Government Association

Nicole Rea, Manchester

David Rumney, Newcastle

Nicholas Aldridge, NHS Digital

Gill Leng, Public Health England

Vince Roberts, Sheffield

Iain Shenstone, St. Mungo’s

Ian Canadine, St. Mungo’s

Sheila Spencer, North East Homelessness Think Tank

Ellen Reaich, Homelessness and Support, DCLG

Lucy Spurling, Homelessness and Troubled Families Analysis, DCLG

Kian Raafat, Homelessness and Troubled Families Analysis, DCLG

**Mike Young**, responsible statistician for homelessness statistics, thanked everyone for attending and expressed DCLG’s intention to improve rough sleeping data. He stressed what a crucial time it is to develop homelessness data while we have an interested audience and momentum following the UKSA review of homelessness data, the second reading of the Homelessness reduction Bill, the launch of the prevention Trailblazer programme, and the forthcoming redesign of the P1E form. He explained the purpose of the roundtable is to help form the forward plan of what data needs to be collected in the future and how it could be captured. He thanked those who had completed the survey sent out in advance and summarized the findings.

Mike then introduced two data systems that already collect many details on rough sleepers (CHAIN by St. Mungo’s in London and Inform by Homeless Link throughout England) and invited representatives from both to give an overview of their system.

**Ian Canadine, CHAIN Information Manager at St Mungo's Broadway**

Ian defined CHAIN as a multi-agency database recording information about rough sleepers and the wider street population in London. CHAIN allows users to share information about work done with rough sleepers and about their needs, ensuring the most appropriate support is provided and that efforts are not duplicated. Reports from the system are used at an operational level by commissioning bodies to monitor the effectiveness of their services, and at a more strategic level by policy makers to gather intelligence about trends within the rough sleeping population and to identify emerging needs.

He explained that CHAIN has two levels of access – boroughs, outreach teams, hostels and larger day centers typically have an editing view of the data, whilst smaller day centers may only have read-only access.

CHAIN’s main focus is verified rough sleepers, who have to be found bedded down by an outreach worker or the no second night out team at least once to enter the system. CHAIN collects details and demographics about the rough sleepers and also holds data on support needs and previous circumstances, outcomes, actions and events. This provides insight, such as spatial plots of instances of rough sleeping, that allow services to be refined.

CHAIN uses three levels of data to keep essential information robust but also to allow for broader data to be collected:

1. fields that are compulsory if a record is to be created e.g. demographic data
2. fields which are regularly monitored e.g. drugs assessment – and organisations are given targets for the number of individuals with these fields completed
3. other information - not regularly monitored

One issue of the system is that the more resources are deployed, the larger the numbers will appear as there will be more support workers on the street.

Ian explained some of the things that have made CHAIN so successful: having an operative working already established, authority buy in and oversight, steer from the GLA, demonstrable benefits to stakeholders and a clear focus to the data being collected, which is needed for data protection purposes and to avoid the data becoming messy.

**Matt Harrison, Director of business and social enterprise, Inform and Homeless Link**

Matt explained that Inform is a case management platform to record the work of service providers in the rough sleeping sector. Their members can sign up for basic or bespoke services and all the data from these members are brought together in anonymized form in the Inform Datalab for homelessness research. In his experience, there are always biases in using data collected for operational purposes for policy decisions, so a street count will always be needed alongside any larger database.

Matt gave us an international overview of rough sleeping data. Some European countries use a population register and others use both a register and a rough sleeping count. The USA has a mandatory data standard that requires information to be collection on hostels, supported housing and street homelessness. In Canada collecting this information is mandatory for funding, but they also do additional point in time counts in hostels and street audits.

The meeting then broke into 3 groups to consider different aspects of what would be needed in an improved data system in the short term and long term. The groups’ discussions overlapped somewhat - feedback was as follows:

**Group 1 - What needs to be done to achieve consistency across data on rough sleepers/people in hostels?**

* Which fields can be and need to be standardised across databases for organisations working with people in hostels or sleeping rough?
* What are the barriers to bringing in standardised fields and how can they be overcome?
* What are the barriers to standardised data recording (i.e. everyone recording data in the same way) for these fields and how can they be overcome?
* Is there a standardised way of recording homelessness status that should be used by non-homeless organisations (e.g. health, police)?
* What is the infrastructure needed to achieve this? i.e. can/should fields be added on to existing databases?

There are a number of difficult issues to overcome. There is no shared definition of homelessness, and to get one would require working with other sectors. Definition of outcomes is problematic – suggestions were engagement, harm reduction, qualifications, the outcomes star. Outcome measures should be linked to needs assessments. There will always be resources issues. Which unique identifiers could be used – NI number (not available for under 16s), NHS numbers? There are issues about security of systems, permissions to share, consent, and linking. There is a need for a clear legislative framework around permissions. There is a need to grow working relationships.

Early steps could focus on taking down silos between outreach and accommodation, and different accommodation services. In the context of the legislation, we need to look at the journey through the system. It might be worth considering what could be learnt from the old Supporting People outcomes, the cohort for which had a clear definition although the outcomes were not necessarily that useful and there were completion issues.

Inputters of data should be able to make use of the data, in order to get good quality (and therefore truly standardised) measures. Eventually this would become business as usual, reducing burden.

The group felt we should be clear about what we want to see at a national level, and why. A national requirement could be justified by reference to better local commissioning and making local services more outcomes focused and joined up. A central requirement should not be too onerous, and should not stop areas from collecting their own data in a way that suits their service or client. Standardising too much will stifle innovation. It is important to bring health and housing together. A joined up system has the potential to spot those at risk, for example in a substance misuse service, even if they are not in housing need, helping to measure longer term outcomes.

# Group 2 – Who needs to share/access data on rough sleepers/people in hostels and how can this be facilitated?

* Which organisations need to share data on single homeless people?
* Over what geographic areas should data be shared?
* How should data be shared? i.e. shared database/parts of database shared/view only/reports provided? How will the extent to which data is shared differ across different organisations/type of organisations?
* What are the key barriers to sharing data and how can these be overcome?
* What infrastructure is needed to share data across organisations?

The group suggested local authorities should be included in the data collection in the short term and encouraged to include any information they have on other service providers in the data. The group also agreed that it would not be cost effective to ask small authorities without a major homelessness problem to sign onto a complex system.

In the longer term many were keen to extend this ‘membership’ to all quality service providers who would come into contact with a rough sleeper (including police and health data if possible). At a minimum they would like this to included statutory homelessness, rough sleeping, hostel and begging data.

There were also suggestions on what data fields should be collected – it was suggested contacting all local authorities to find what data they currently hold on rough sleeping and services to find common fields. These common fields could then be mandated across authorities. It was hoped that these commonalities would include ‘share points,’ such as when someone leaves or enters a hostel.

The group thought that it would be useful to have an England level data system, especially as the Homelessness Reduction Bill comes in, to check if someone had previously been seen sleeping rough in another authority. In the short term they thought it would be more feasible for small areas to set up data shares together, i.e. Greater Manchester.   
  
A shared information depository was the preferred format to share data, as most local authorities already have their own IT systems to collect and use information. It was suggested that different levels of access could be used to protect sensitive information such as health. In the previous experience of the group, giving full information on how the information is used is important to getting user consent. Other variations suggested include a system where a warning pops up when an old case in the database is accessed asking ‘Do you have the client’s consent to open this?’   
  
Further work was suggested looking into the police’s system of sharing local data at a national level and the historic St. Andrew’s system.

The group was in favour of keeping the street count in its current form to be able to get a statistically fair picture of increases and decreases in street homelessness nationally.

# Group 3 - Who needs to be included in this data?

* At what stage should people appear on a database used to inform services/commissioning and policy decisions about rough sleepers and homeless people?
* For how long should people’s information be updated? What are the outcomes that need to be covered?
* Which organisations should be capturing experiences of homelessness/rough sleeping and how can they share that information?
* What are the key barriers to achieving comprehensive data and how can they be overcome?

In the first year of a new system, it was agreed that it would be critical to record everyone coming into contact with Housing Options, regardless of their priority need status, those seen sleeping rough (bedded down and non-bedded down) by an outreach team and those using a homelessness service commissioned by the Local Authority/County Council.

In three years, it was hoped this list could be expanded to include people using a homelessness service not commissioned by the LA/CC, and people in the private sector, such as B&Bs

Ideally, other services would provide information – potentially using a Common Assessment Framework - to both flag people at risk of homelessness and better identify homeless people’s wider support needs. The individuals identified as critical to include are those:

* Seen in Accident and Emergency
* Coming into (and out of) the criminal justice system
* Receiving drug treatment
* Experiencing domestic violence
* In contact with mental health services
* Leaving care

The discussion touched on the length of time people’s information should be updated and it was agreed that it wasn’t feasible to follow people once they had entered accommodation, but that if they came into contact with other services (using a CAF) that would be one way of updating the information.

One of the main barriers to achieving comprehensive data was identified as the number of different systems in use across the country already. The group thought it was not possible to have a national system, as outreach teams do not exist everywhere in the country and therefore rough sleeping would not be captured, and also as there is a lack of incentive for non-LA commissioned services to record information.

The group identified potential solutions and next steps such as finding out what systems are used and what information is currently collected across the country (including PNC), using a HUB approach, street counts to be maintained and that the benefits of the data collection to all organisations would need to be demonstrated.

**Summary and next steps**

Mike thanked all of attending and sharing their ideas. He explained that this is the start of an engagement process, and he wants to build a continuing relationship. A website will be created to facilitate keeping in touch, and this note of the meeting will be circulated and placed on the website. He invited attendees to forward the website and his details to others with an interest in this topic. He also invited them to forward on the survey monkey link so that others could reply if they wish – the link is <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/P5P2P72>.

There was strong support from attendees to maintain communication with this group, with a possible further meeting in the future.

Following the meeting, and based on the key themes which emerged from the table discussions, DCLG will initially look to progress the following actions;

• There is a clear perceived continued need for the annual counts, so this will be commissioned as usual next year.

• Work will be done as part of the P1E redesign to record all contacts with Housing Options, capturing enough information to identify individuals to create the possibility of linking with other sources such as hostels, CHAIN type systems, health systems etc.

• Building on the P1E work with Housing Options, we will collaborate with some or all of the authorities who bid into the recently launched rough sleeping funds, to investigate the potential to expand this data collection to include, for example, individuals in hostels (at least those commissioned by the authority) and also explore the possibilities for collecting and flagging housing related data on those leaving care and reporting domestic violence. The scope for creating shared depositories of data locally will be explored as well as the possibilities for linking data across the areas.

• We will meet with other public sector stakeholders in particular health, education and police to assess the potential for them to collect data from individuals on housing situations, and more generally to get their views and suggestions on roundtable discussion points.

• We will collate and assess information from local authorities and providers about the data and systems that already exist to capture rough sleeping and hostels.

In the medium term we will further explore the potential for a national dataset using the information from this meeting and subsequent discussions with other stakeholders.