

BCAN Homeless Forum  
Information Sheet

# Official Numbers of Homeless People

## Introduction

There is a great deal of confusion about the number of homeless people in the UK. In particular, the official published number of homeless people in Bristol is far lower than the number reported by the charities working with the homeless.

In the Autumn of 2002, the official count of rough sleepers was 7, but a reporter from the local paper found around 40 without much difficulty.

## Why the Numbers Matter

If the number of homeless people is in fact very low, we should target resources at other needy groups.

It would also mean that the homeless charities are guilty of exaggerating the number of homeless people in order to raise the profile of their work and attract greater funding. If this were the case, their moral integrity would be completely undermined and the public would no longer be able to trust what they say.

## What Does 'Homeless' Mean?

It is important to recognise that the official definition of homelessness includes two groups:

- Rough Sleepers ('RS')
- No Fixed Abode ('NFA')

Homelessness is also a lifestyle. People can live as homeless even if they have their own flat.

There are many more people with no fixed abode than rough sleepers. It is also much harder to get a reliable estimate of the numbers of people with no fixed abode.

## What Does the Official Count Measure?

***Rough sleepers.*** If people are in hostels, or sleeping on a friend's settee, they are not counted.

***Those actually asleep.*** If the police have been round five minutes earlier and woken people, they are not counted.

***Those on the streets.*** If they are in squats or hidden on building sites, they are not counted.

***Those on the official route.*** If they are sleeping on a different road, or if they are well hidden (maybe behind bins), they are not counted.