CHAIN QUARTERLY AND ANNUAL DATA TABLES – EXPLANATORY NOTES

SUPPORTED BY

MAYOR OF LONDON

Introduction

This document provides explanatory notes relating to CHAIN quarterly and annual data tables files. These files provide the data underlying CHAIN quarterly and annual published reports, in an accessible aggregated tabular format. The data files and published reports can be downloaded from the GLA Datastore at https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/chain-reports. An interactive visualisation tool based on quarterly data can be accessed at https://bit.ly/chain-quarterly-vis-tool, while a version based on annual data can be accessed at https://bit.ly/chain-annual-vis-tool.

Information in the data files is derived from CHAIN (Combined Homelessness and Information Network), a multi-agency database recording information about rough sleepers and the wider street population in London. CHAIN represents the UK's most detailed and comprehensive source of information about rough sleeping, and is commissioned and funded by the Greater London Authority (GLA). The system is managed by Homeless Link. Services that record information on CHAIN include outreach teams, accommodation projects and specialist projects such as the GLA commissioned No Second Night Out (NSNO) assessment and reconnection service.

The quarterly version of the data file covers the most recent full financial quarter, plus the preceding seven quarters, for purposes of comparison (i.e. a total period of 24 months). The most recent quarter is referred to on the cover sheet of the data file as the publication period.

The annual version of the data file covers the most recent full financial year, plus the preceding four financial years, for purposes of comparison (i.e. a total period of five financial years). The most recent financial year is referred to on the cover sheet of the data file as the publication period.

The explanatory notes include a section for each table in the data file, covering any points that should be borne in mind when using the data.

General points to note when using the file

Tables prefixed with P give breakdowns of various characteristics of people seen rough sleeping in a period. Tables prefixed with F give breakdowns of information relating to the history prior to rough sleeping of new and returning rough sleepers during a period. Tables prefixed with O give breakdowns of outcomes achieved with rough sleepers in a period.

The tables give figures for people or activity recorded in the separate local authority areas within London, and for the overall area of the Greater London Authority. In tables giving figures for number of people seen rough sleeping, or history prior to rough sleeping, the combined total of local authority areas in a given period will be higher than the overall total for the Greater London Authority, as some people will have been seen rough sleeping in more than one local authority area during the period.

In each table, local authorities and the Greater London Authority are listed alongside their GSS codes. The GSS code is a fixed length code of nine characters which is used by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to provide a unique identifier for a wide range of geographical areas of the UK.

In tables giving figures for number of people seen rough sleeping and history prior to rough sleeping, data is provided for 'Heathrow', 'bus route', and 'tube line', in addition to local authorities and the Greater London Authority. Although Heathrow Airport is located within the borough of Hillingdon, it is counted separately for the purposes of CHAIN reporting, due to the specific rough sleeping issues found there. Where rough sleepers have been seen by outreach workers on public transport, their contacts are ascribed to the type of transport rather than to a particular local authority area.

Periodisation of data in the tables is based on financial years, running from April to March, with the first quarter (referred to as Q1) covering April to June, while the fourth quarter (referred to as Q4) covers January to March.

In tables giving breakdowns for people seen rough sleeping, each period will start with a column giving the total number of people seen rough sleeping in the period, followed by columns detailing the number of these falling into each category of the particular breakdown. In tables giving breakdowns for history prior to rough sleeping, each period will start with a column giving the total number of new or returning rough sleepers in the period, followed by columns detailing the number of these falling into each category of the particular breakdown.

Caution should be exercised when drawing conclusions from proportions and trends based on low overall totals in a particular area, period, or category.

P1: Number of people seen rough sleeping in London, by area

Overall total of people seen rough sleeping in each area of London, and in the Greater London Authority area overall, during the period.

P2: Rough sleeping category of people seen rough sleeping in London, by area

To aid analysis, people seen rough sleeping in a given period are categorised according to previous history of rough sleeping and/or volume and spread of rough sleeping contacts. Different methodologies are used for quarterly and annual reporting.

It should be noted that definitions of new and returning rough sleepers used in these categories differ from those employed in reporting for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) data-led framework for ending rough sleeping.

Quarterly data – New/LOS/Intermittent

In quarterly data, people seen rough sleeping during the quarter are categorised according to whether they had also been seen rough sleeping prior to the quarter, and the volume and spread of their rough sleeping contacts. Everyone included in the overall total must have been seen rough sleeping at least once during the quarter, but in order to ensure that we do not miscategorise those whose rough sleeping was clustered across the boundary between quarters, we include contacts recorded in the three weeks immediately preceding the start of the quarter. In the summary below, we refer to this overall period of the quarter plus the three preceding weeks as the monitoring period.

Category	Description
New RS with no second night out	People who had never been seen rough sleeping in London prior to the start of the quarter, and who only had one rough sleeping contact during the quarter.
New RS with a second night out but not living on the streets	People who had never been seen rough sleeping in London prior to the start of the quarter, and who had more than one rough sleeping contact during the monitoring period, but who did not meet the criteria to be deemed living on the streets (LOS).
New RS joining living on the streets population	People who had never been seen rough sleeping in London prior to the start of the quarter, and who had five or more rough sleeping contacts during the monitoring period, with at least 21 days elapsed between the first and last of these. This group are also separately categorised as 'LOS - Transferred from new RS'.
LOS - Transferred from new RS	People who had never been seen rough sleeping in London prior to the start of the quarter, and who had five or more rough sleeping contacts during the monitoring period, with at least 21 days elapsed between the first and last of these. This group are also separately categorised as 'New RS joining living on the streets population'.

Category	Description
LOS - Known	People who had been seen rough sleeping in London at some point prior to the start of the quarter, and who had five or more rough sleeping contacts during the monitoring period, with at least 21 days elapsed between the first and last of these.
LOS - RS205+	People included in the RS205 cohort of hardest to help rough sleepers, who were seen rough sleeping at least once during the quarter. The use of this category has been discontinued from 2025/26 Q1 onwards. It was felt that more accurate analysis could be achieved by applying the same criteria to all people seen rough sleeping in the period, regardless of prior membership of other cohorts.
Intermittent rough sleeper	People who had been seen rough sleeping in London at some point prior to the start of the quarter, but who did not meet the criteria to be deemed living on the streets (LOS).

It is important to note that one group of people are categorised twice, both as 'New RS joining living on the streets population' and 'LOS - Transferred from new RS'. This is because these people simultaneously meet the criteria to be new rough sleepers and living on the streets. The fact that the same group of people are included in two separate categories means that the combined total of categories will be higher than the overall total of people seen rough sleeping in a period.

The table includes total columns for new rough sleepers and living on the streets (LOS). These totals represent the combined sum of the individual categories under the respective headings. Because there is a group of people who are counted under both headings, as referenced above, the combined total of the totals for new rough sleepers, living on the streets (LOS), and intermittent rough sleepers will also be higher than the overall total of people seen rough sleeping in a period.

The discontinuation of the LOS - RS205+ category, from 2025/26 Q1 onwards, could have the effect of slightly reducing overall Living on the Streets totals as presented in the data, although it is anticipated that the impact will be minor. The change in methodology should be borne in mind when comparing Living on the Streets totals from before and after April 2025.

Annual data – Flow/Stock/Returner

In the annual data, people seen rough sleeping during the financial year are categorised according to whether they had also been seen rough sleeping prior to the financial year,

and whether they had been seen rough sleeping in consecutive years. New rough sleepers are also subcategorised according to whether they had been identified.

Category	Description
Flow - unidentified	People who had never been seen rough sleeping prior to the reporting year (i.e. new rough sleepers), who had been recorded without a name, and with only one contact during the year.
Flow - identified	People who had never been seen rough sleeping prior to the reporting year (i.e. new rough sleepers), who had been recorded with a name, and/or with more than one contact during the year.
Stock	People who were also seen rough sleeping in the previous year (i.e. those seen across a minimum of two consecutive years).
Returner	People who were first seen rough sleeping prior to the reporting year, but who were not seen during the previous year (i.e. those who have had a gap in their rough sleeping histories).

The table includes a total flow column, giving the combined sum of the unidentified and identified flow subcategories. The combined total of the total flow column and the stock and returner columns will equal the total seen rough sleeping column.

P3: Nationality (region) of people seen rough sleeping in London, by area

Nationality of people seen rough sleeping in the period, grouped into broad overall categories. People from Europe are categorised based on whether their country of origin is a member of the European Economic Area (EEA), which can have a significant influence on access to welfare benefits. People from outside Europe are categorised by continent.

When calculating nationality percentages for the purposes of CHAIN reports, people whose nationality is not known are usually excluded from the base (i.e. the base would be the figure in the total seen rough sleeping column minus the figure in the not known column).

P4: Gender of people seen rough sleeping in London, by area

Gender of people seen rough sleeping in the period.

When calculating gender percentages for the purposes of CHAIN reports, people whose gender is not known are usually excluded from the base (i.e. the base would be the figure in the total seen rough sleeping column minus the figure in the not known column).

P5: Age of people seen rough sleeping in London, by area

Age of people seen rough sleeping in the period, grouped into broad overall categories. Where it has not been possible to obtain an accurate date of birth from an individual, their date of birth will be estimated.

P6: Ethnicity of people seen rough sleeping in London, by area

Ethnicity of people seen rough sleeping in the period.

The previously employed category of 'Gypsy/Romany/Irish Traveller' was replaced in April 2021 with separate categories for 'White - Gypsy/Irish Traveller' and 'White - Roma', in order to bring CHAIN recording into line with Office for National Statistics usage. Some people seen rough sleeping during subsequent periods have not had their ethnicity information updated to reflect these new categories, so the original category is also included in the table.

P7: Support needs combination and summary of people seen rough sleeping in London, by area

The combination, and overall summary of, the support needs of people seen rough sleeping during the period.

Support needs data recorded on CHAIN is based on assessments made by homelessness workers. In most cases the person making the assessment will not have clinical expertise, although input from clinical professionals may have been taken into account.

Support needs information included in this data file is based on the assessment most recently recorded, relative to each period in which an individual was seen rough sleeping. CHAIN users are encouraged to update support needs assessments at least every six months, but in some cases the information could be much older.

The total assessed column indicates the number of people seen rough sleeping in the period whose most recent assessment included information about at least one factor from either alcohol, drugs, or mental health. The total not assessed column indicates the number of people seen rough sleeping in the period who either had never had a support needs assessment, or whose most recent assessment did not include any information about their alcohol, drugs, or mental health needs.

When calculating alcohol, drugs or mental health support needs percentages for the purposes of CHAIN reports, the total assessed is usually used as the base.

The support needs combination describes the specific combination of alcohol, drugs and mental health needs that each individual is assessed to be experiencing. The columns in the support needs combination section are therefore mutually exclusive, and the combined total of these columns will be the same as the total assessed.

The support needs summary columns indicate the overall number of people who have a need in each of the three areas, as well as the overall number who had a need in two or more of the three areas. These columns are not mutually exclusive (i.e. an individual could be counted in more than one of these columns), and the combined total of these columns is likely to be higher than the total assessed.

The support needs combination and summary sections of the table provide different ways of analysing the same information, and do not represent different categories of data.

P8, P9, P10: Alcohol, drugs, and mental health support needs of people seen rough sleeping in London, by area

Level of support need relating to alcohol (P8), drugs (P9), and mental health (P10), of people seen rough sleeping during the period. Please see notes on P7 for information on how support needs assessments are recorded and included in the figures, and what the total assessed and total not assessed columns indicate.

The columns in the tables indicate the number of people seen rough sleeping during the period who were assessed as experiencing high, medium, low, or no need in a given area of need.

Prior to the introduction of recording of levels of need on CHAIN, support needs assessments simply recorded whether an individual was or wasn't experiencing a particular need. A small number of people included in the data file have only had the old format assessment recorded, and are counted in the 'need recorded (level not known)' column.

The columns indicating level of need are mutually exclusive, and the combined total of these columns will be the same as the total assessed.

When calculating alcohol, drugs or mental health support needs percentages for the purposes of CHAIN reports, the total assessed is usually used as the base.

P11: Institutional and armed forces history of people seen rough sleeping in London, by area

Experience of spending time in prison or local authority care for young people, or of serving in the armed forces, of people seen rough sleeping during the period.

This information indicates whether individuals have ever spent time in one of these settings, and does not necessarily imply that this was recent. It can include time spent in one of these settings in any country, and does not necessarily imply that it was in the UK.

The total assessed column indicates the number of people seen rough sleeping in the period who have information recorded about at least one factor from either armed forces, care, or prison. The total not assessed column indicates the number of people seen rough sleeping in the period who do not have information recorded about armed forces, care or prison experience.

When calculating armed forces, care and prison experience percentages for the purposes of CHAIN reports, the total assessed is usually used as the base.

The institutional and armed forces history combination describes the specific combination of armed forces, care and prison experience that each individual is assessed to have. The columns in the institutional and armed forces history combination section are therefore mutually exclusive, and the combined total of these columns will be the same as the total assessed.

The institutional and armed forces history summary columns indicate the overall number of people who have experience in each of the three areas, as well as the overall number who were UK nationals with experience of serving in the armed forces. These columns are not mutually exclusive (i.e. an individual could be counted in more than one of these columns), and the combined total of these columns is likely to be higher than the total assessed.

The institutional and armed forces history combination and summary sections of the table provide different ways of analysing the same information, and do not represent different categories of data.

P12: Nationality (detail) of people seen rough sleeping in London, by area

Nationality of people seen rough sleeping in the period, by individual nation. The separate nation columns are grouped under headings using the same overall categories employed in P3. People from Europe are categorised based on whether their country of origin is a member of the European Economic Area (EEA), which can have a significant influence on access to welfare benefits. People from outside Europe are categorised by continent.

When calculating nationality percentages for the purposes of CHAIN reports, people whose nationality is not known are usually excluded from the base (i.e. the base would be the figure in the total seen rough sleeping column minus the figure in the not known column).

Due to the large number of columns required, this table provides data only for the publication period, and does not include comparative data for previous periods, unlike other tables in the file.

P13: Number of times seen rough sleeping during the period, for people seen rough sleeping in London, by area (annual data tables only)

Number of times seen rough sleeping during the period, of people seen rough sleeping during the period, grouped into categories.

The number of times seen rough sleeping is based on contacts recorded across London overall. To be included in the figures for a discrete area, an individual must have been seen rough sleeping in that area at least once during the period, but some of the contacts counted towards their overall number of times seen rough sleeping may have occurred in other areas. For example, an individual who was seen once in Camden and twice in Westminster during the period would be counted in the 'Three to five' category for both Camden and Westminster (as well as for the overall Greater London Authority area).

Outreach resources vary across boroughs, but even in places with extensive outreach coverage there may not be a shift every night. This will affect the frequency with which people may be recorded rough sleeping.

F1: Last settled base in the UK of new rough sleepers in London, by area (annual data tables only)

The last settled base in the UK prior to the start of the rough sleeping episode, for new rough sleepers in London during the period.

For this purpose, a new rough sleeper is defined as someone who had either never been recorded rough sleeping in London prior to the period, or who had been recorded rough sleeping in London prior to the period, but not during the 60 months (i.e. five years) preceding their first rough sleeping contact in the period. This is the definition used by the MHCLG data-led framework for ending rough sleeping, and it should be noted that this differs from the definition of new rough sleepers (or 'flow') used in Table P2.

An individual included in this data could potentially also be included in the data for returning rough sleepers covering the same year, presented in Table F3, if they were first seen in the year as a new rough sleeper, had a period of at least 180 days of not being seen, and were then seen again.

An individual will be included in the data for a discrete area if they were seen rough sleeping in that area at any time between the start of their rough sleeping episode as a new rough sleeper, and the end of the year.

Last settled base refers to the last accommodation of a settled nature in which the individual lived. It may be that an individual could also have stayed at some other accommodation in an unsettled situation since leaving their last settled base. If the person was living in private accommodation of some form (e.g. private rented, council tenancy, housing association, owner occupied), and they were a sole or joint legal tenant or owner of the property, their last settled base would be recorded using the option that describes the type of accommodation (e.g. 'private rented accommodation'). If they were staying with someone who was a sole or joint legal tenant or owner of the property, but they themselves were not a sole or joint legal tenant or owner of the property, then they would be recorded as 'living with family/friends/partner'.

The table presents the majority of last settled base types grouped under three broad categories, and a total column is included for each category, before the columns for the individual types of base falling within the category are listed. A further three types of response are listed separately after the main categories.

When calculating last settled base percentages for the purposes of CHAIN reports, the total recorded is usually used as the base.

The current recording methodology was introduced midway through 2022/23, so full annual datasets can only be provided for 2023/24 and subsequent years.

F2: Type of departure from last settled base in the UK of new rough sleepers in London, by area (annual data tables only)

The type of departure from last settled base in the UK prior to the start of the rough sleeping episode, for new rough sleepers in London during the period.

See F1 for definitions of new rough sleeper and last settled base.

Type of departure refers to the broad circumstances of the person's departure from their last settled base in the UK, for example whether they were evicted or left of their own accord.

When calculating type of departure from last settled base percentages for the purposes of CHAIN reports, the total recorded is usually used as the base.

The current recording methodology was introduced midway through 2022/23, so full annual datasets can only be provided for 2023/24 and subsequent years.

F3: Cause of departure from last settled base in the UK of new rough sleepers in London, by area (annual data tables only)

The cause of departure from last settled base in the UK prior to the start of the rough sleeping episode, for new rough sleepers in London during the period.

See F1 for definitions of new rough sleeper and last settled base.

Cause of departure refers to the main reason underlying the person's departure from their last settled base in the UK. The circumstances leading to someone leaving their accommodation can be complicated, with multiple factors potentially involved. This information describes the most immediate or influential cause in each case.

When calculating cause of departure from last settled base percentages for the purposes of CHAIN reports, the total recorded is usually used as the base.

The current recording methodology was introduced midway through 2022/23, so full annual datasets can only be provided for 2023/24 and subsequent years.

F4: Last settled base in the UK of returning rough sleepers in London, by area (annual data tables only)

The last settled base in the UK prior to the start of the rough sleeping episode, for returning rough sleepers in London during the period.

For this purpose, a returning rough sleeper is defined as someone who had returned to rough sleeping after at least 180 days since their previous rough sleeping contact. This is the definition used by the MHCLG data-led framework for ending rough sleeping, and it should be noted that this differs from the definition of returner rough sleepers used in Table P2.

An individual included in this data could potentially also be included in the data for new rough sleepers covering the same year, presented in Table F1, if they were first seen in the year as a new rough sleeper, had a period of at least 180 days of not being seen, and were then seen again. It is also possible that an individual could have been recorded as returning to rough sleeping more than once during the year. In cases where this has occurred, only the information relating to the individual's most recent return is included in this data.

An individual will be included in the data for a discrete area if they were seen rough sleeping in that area at any time between the start of their rough sleeping episode as a returning rough sleeper, and the end of the year.

See F1 for definition of last settled base.

The table presents the majority of last settled base types grouped under three broad categories, and a total column is included for each category, before the columns for the individual types of base falling within the category are listed. A further three types of response are listed separately after the main categories.

When calculating last settled base percentages for the purposes of CHAIN reports, the total recorded is usually used as the base.

The current recording methodology was introduced midway through 2022/23, so full annual datasets can only be provided for 2023/24 and subsequent years.

F5: Type of departure from last settled base in the UK of returning rough sleepers in London, by area (annual data tables only)

The type of departure from last settled base in the UK prior to the start of the rough sleeping episode, for returning rough sleepers in London during the period.

See F4 for definition of returning rough sleeper, and F1 for definition of last settled base.

Type of departure refers to the broad circumstances of the person's departure from their last settled base in the UK, for example whether they were evicted or left of their own accord.

When calculating type of departure from last settled base percentages for the purposes of CHAIN reports, the total recorded is usually used as the base.

The current recording methodology was introduced midway through 2022/23, so full annual datasets can only be provided for 2023/24 and subsequent years.

F6: Cause of departure from last settled base in the UK of returning rough sleepers in London, by area (annual data tables only)

The cause of departure from last settled base in the UK prior to the start of the rough sleeping episode, for returning rough sleepers in London during the period.

See F4 for definition of returning rough sleeper, and F1 for definition of last settled base.

Cause of departure refers to the main reason underlying the person's departure from their last settled base in the UK. The circumstances leading to someone leaving their accommodation can be complicated, with multiple factors potentially involved. This information describes the most immediate or influential cause in each case.

When calculating cause of departure from last settled base percentages for the purposes of CHAIN reports, the total recorded is usually used as the base.

The current recording methodology was introduced midway through 2022/23, so full annual datasets can only be provided for 2023/24 and subsequent years.

O1: Accommodation outcomes of people seen rough sleeping in London (annual data), or people with a history of rough sleeping in London (quarterly data), by area

Accommodation outcomes achieved by outreach teams, No Second Night Out, and other support services during the period.

In the quarterly version of the data file, this table will include accommodation outcomes recorded during the period for people who have been seen rough sleeping in London at any point in their history, but not necessarily during the reporting period.

In the annual version of the data file, this table will only include accommodation outcomes recorded during the period for people who were also seen rough sleeping in London during the period.

The table specifically refers to moves into accommodation in the UK. Referrals into accommodation outside the UK would be recorded as reconnections.

The table is based on the number of outcomes rather than the number of people with outcomes. Some people may have had multiple outcomes recorded during a given period, and could therefore be double counted within a given accommodation type, or across accommodation types.

Outcomes are ascribed to individual boroughs based on which local authority commissions the service recording the outcome. Where a service is commissioned by the Greater London Authority (e.g. NSNO) or is jointly commissioned by multiple boroughs (e.g. South East Regional Outreach Team), its outcomes will not be counted against a local authority area, but will be counted in the overall figure for the Greater London Authority area.

The table presents accommodation outcomes under three broad categories, and a total column is included for each category, before the columns for the individual types of accommodation falling within the category are listed. An overall total for all accommodation outcomes during the period is also presented in the first column for the period.