# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Annual Rough Sleeper Count**  |
| **DATE**  | **04February 2020** |
| **BY** | **Julie James, Minister for Housing and Local Government**  |

The Welsh Government has today published the annual [National Rough Sleeper Count](https://gov.wales/national-rough-sleeper-count-november-2019), which was undertaken in October and November 2019. The count provides a snapshot picture of rough sleeper numbers, with local authorities providing a two week estimate and undertaking a one night count. We have set out in previous years the limitations of the count and acknowledged last year that the apparent stabilisation of rough sleeper numbers in 2018 did not reflect what we all saw on the streets of Wales.

As a Government committed to the goal of ending homelessness, we are of course disappointed that the numbers reported in the 2019 count have increased. We are not, however, surprised by the increase. It reflects the reality of what we see on our streets, the complexity of the issues and the discussions we have with stakeholders. I have set out on a number of occasions that despite our increased investment and ground breaking preventative legislation, local authorities are facing a rising tide in the numbers of people sleeping rough, due in no small part to the impact of the UK Government’s austerity policies and the impact of welfare reforms. I acknowledged in my statement to the Assembly in October 2019 that we needed to do more and think afresh about our approach. This is precisely what our new strategic approach for preventing and ending homelessness, published in October 2019, aims to do. It is also the reason I established the Homelessness Action Group, in recognition of the need to think afresh and do things differently, utilising the expertise available in Wales and beyond to achieve the change required.

Whilst these figures are disappointing, it is vital we maintain our focus on working with the Homelessness Action Group and act on their expert advice to improve our response to these issues in Wales. It is important to acknowledge that the first report of the Homelessness Action Group was published in October 2019 and work to implement its recommendations will not therefore be reflected in the 2019 count. In line with the Report’s recommendations, Welsh Government has been working with a number of local authorities across Wales to implement the recommendations. Despite there being no quick and easy single solution to these issues, there have already been positive impacts from this work. In responding to the recommendations we have delivered training to support outreach workers to develop their assertive outreach skills evidenced, to be the most effective way to deliver outreach services to individuals and find them the right route off the streets into long-term sustainable housing. We have also provided funding for personalised budgets to empower outreach workers so they have the autonomy and agility to respond immediately to a person’s needs and provided funding to ensure that efforts across statutory and voluntary services is well coordinated. We also continue to provide funding to facilitate a multi-agency response and our Housing First approach is gaining traction, now supporting 61 people who would likely otherwise be rough sleeping tonight.

The challenge now is embedding the long term recommendations to ensure that homelessness is prevented earlier, avoiding people sleeping rough. As set out in our strategic statement, we need to shift our focus to earlier intervention and prevention, taking a public service wide response, whilst also continuing to support people off the streets into long term, suitable accommodation.

As well as the work of the Homelessness Action Group, Welsh Government is already investing in and supporting local authorities to take forward innovative projects to prevent rough sleeping or rapidly re-house rough sleepers with complex needs. We have protected homelessness budgets, including the vital £126m which goes into the Housing Support Grant.

I acknowledge the numbers sleeping rough on our streets continues to be unacceptably high. However, the key experts we have engaged to work with us, to advise and help accelerate the work we have already commenced, demonstrates our continuing commitment to addressing this issue. I believe the strategic approach we are taking to preventing and ending homelessness is the right framework to take forward this work. The reports of the Homelessness Action Group will help inform the action plan to sit underneath it. I would like to place on record my gratitude to all the local authority and third sector outreach officers who work tirelessly to support people sleeping rough into accommodation, work which is both challenging and rewarding. We have the building blocks in place to make a real impact and change in this area and despite setbacks we must continue to trust our strategy to prevent and end homelessness in Wales.