



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

UK Statistics Authority  
London

- 3 JUL 2009

Received

Sir Michael Scholar  
Chair, UK Statistics Authority  
Statistics House  
Islington  
London EC1R 1UW

2 July 2009

*Dear Sir Michael*

I am writing to make formal complaint over the use of statistics in a press release issued by the Justice Minister Bridget Prentice. This press release is also the subject of a separate complaint to the Cabinet Secretary over the use of civil service resources for party political purposes.

The press release claimed that 'A pilot programme offering real help to people at risk of home repossession and eviction is showing early positive signs of reducing the likelihood of home repossession for people in Norwich. The Housing Arrears Pre-Action Scheme is designed to offer those suffering financial difficulties and at risk of repossession early advice to help identify solutions that could prevent eviction before a claim is issued. In the 12 months to June 2009, more than two thirds of the people who received advice are maintaining their repayments and avoiding rent possession proceedings'.

The Ministry of Justice have released no statistics – beyond the 'more than two thirds' figure – to back up the assertion that the scheme has reduced the likelihood of people losing their homes.

1. Without figures showing the proportion people who did not receive support were maintaining their payments, it is impossible to show whether those who received support were at lower – or indeed higher – risk of repossession.
2. There is no indication of the number of people who did and did not seek advice, making it impossible to know whether any difference between the two was statistically significant, still less that this was down to the scheme
3. There is no indication of the timeframe for follow-up following advice; indeed, some customers who received advice relatively recently may not yet have been due to make any further repayment yet anyway.
4. Less than two weeks ago, the Minister described the Housing Arrears Pre-Action scheme as being 'currently at pilot stage' (Hansard, 18 June 2009, col. 32WS). It therefore seems unlikely that any formal evaluation of the pilot has taken place in the meantime to justify the Minister's claims.



In short, it seems to me that this claim is based on data which may not have been through proper processes of checking, were not due for publication yet, and were released selectively. It is clear to me that this selective and premature publication occurred as a result of political pressure arising from the forthcoming by-election in Norwich North.

I request that you take this matter up with the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Justice.

*Yours sincerely*

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'D. Grieve', written in a cursive style.

Dominic Grieve QC MP  
Shadow Secretary of State for Justice



Ministry of  
**JUSTICE**

## People at risk of home repossession and eviction in Norwich offered a lifeline

02 July 2009

**A pilot programme offering real help to people at risk of home repossession and eviction is showing early positive signs of reducing the likelihood of home repossession for people in Norwich, Justice Minister Bridget Prentice said today.**

The Housing Arrears Pre-Action Scheme is designed to offer those suffering financial difficulties and at risk of repossession early advice to help identify solutions that could prevent eviction before a claim is issued.

In the 12 months to June 2009, more than two thirds of the people who received advice are maintaining their repayments and avoiding rent possession proceedings.

Justice Minister Bridget Prentice, who visited the Norwich County Court today said:

'Many people are struggling to stay on top of their bills at the moment and I want to make sure anyone facing money troubles has access to the advice they need. This relatively simple initiative has the potential to deliver real help to people struggling in the downturn.'

'The Housing Arrears Pre-Action Scheme is just one of a whole range of initiatives that have been put in place to help people in debt. The Consumer White Paper, which is published today, outlines not only what help is out there now for people in financial difficulties, but also sets out how the government plans to support the public in the longer term as Britain emerges from the downturn.'

Under the scheme, people building up rent arrears are identified by Norwich County Council and invited to meet with an advisor from the Norfolk Community Law Service to find a solution to avoid eviction where possible.

The scheme, which initially targeted people in rent arrears, is being extended to help people facing difficulties meeting their mortgage repayments as well.

Ms Prentice said:

'The advisers inform people about their options and can help them access and organise the appropriate benefits to which they are entitled, as well as liaising with the landlord to reach an agreement that is both manageable for the debtor and reasonable to the landlord.'

'The benefits of this scheme aren't just limited to the debtors. It also has the potential for saving court staff and judicial time by promoting the use of alternatives to court.'

The scheme to identify and assist those in rental arrears has been extended to a

further five pilot courts in Brighton, Clerkenwell, Durham, Nottingham and Sheffield and will run until October 2009. Following an evaluation of the scheme, the Ministry of Justice will explore opportunities to roll the scheme out nationally.

## Notes to editors

1. Media Enquiries: Ministry of Justice Press Office 020 3334 3536
2. The Housing Arrears Pre-Action Scheme was developed at Norwich County Court in conjunction with Norwich City Council, Shelter and Norfolk Community Law Service to avoid rent possession claims being issued by Norwich City Council. The scheme is funded by the Ministry of Justice.
3. The Consumer White Paper is published today (Thursday 2 July) by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

## Contact press office

Newsdesk: 020 3334 3536  
(Mon - Fri: 07:00 to 20:00)

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