
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

Rt. Hon. Iain Duncan Smith MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
LONDON
SW1H 9DA

6 March 2015

Dear Secretary of State

HOMELESSNESS STATISTICS

Thank you for bringing the research report *'The Homelessness Monitor: England 2015'*¹, published by Crisis and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, to my attention. The report raises a number of points in relation to the official statistics which the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) collects and publishes on homelessness.

The Statistics Authority has reviewed the report. We consider that it makes clear that it uses a wider definition of homelessness than that used in official statistics, and it therefore serves to supplement the official statistics. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) publishes a range of official statistics on statutory homelessness and people sleeping rough. In addition to statutory homelessness and people sleeping rough, the Homelessness Monitor includes in its definition:

- single homeless people living in hostels, shelters and temporary supported accommodation; and
- some aspects of 'hidden homelessness' such as 'concealed', 'sharing' and 'overcrowded' households.

The Statistics Authority encourages those producing official statistics to consider the potentially different perspectives of a wide range of users and to seek out other sources of relevant information about their statistics. Such activity can help to corroborate the statistics, can enhance the coherence of statistical reporting, and can serve as a stimulus to check whether the existing statistics meet users' needs.

However, an accompanying press release² titled *'Homelessness much worse than headline figures show'* stated that "The Homelessness Monitor: England 2015 shows how official homelessness figures are masking the true scale of the problem." It included a quote from the Chief Executive of Crisis, who said: "Today's report reveals the true scale of homelessness in England, which headline figures no longer reflect." We consider that this

¹ http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/Homelessness_Monitor_England_2015_final_web.pdf

² <http://www.crisis.org.uk/news.php/946/homelessness-much-worse-than-headline-figures-show>

press release should have been much clearer about the differences in definition used in the Homelessness Monitor report and in the official statistics.

I am copying this to Julia Unwin, Chief Executive of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, and to Jon Sparkes, Chief Executive of Crisis.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Dilnot". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a distinct 'D'.

Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

Annex Further information on definitional differences

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) publishes a range of official statistics on homelessness³ alongside a guidance note⁴ which explains key terms.

- *Statutory homelessness*⁵ presents figures about households which are considered to be ‘statutorily homeless’ – that is, they meet specific criteria set out in legislation⁶.
- Rough sleeping counts and estimates presented in *Rough sleeping*⁷ are single night snapshots of the number of people sleeping rough in local authority areas.
- *Homelessness prevention and relief*⁸ presents statistics on the number of households for which activity took place outside the statutory homelessness framework in order to prevent or relieve homelessness.

In addition to statutory homeless households and people sleeping rough⁹, The Homelessness Monitor includes in its definition:

- single people living in hostels, shelters and temporary supported accommodation; and
- some aspects of ‘hidden homelessness’ such as ‘concealed’, ‘sharing’ and ‘overcrowded’ households.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/homelessness-data-notes-and-definitions>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics#statutory-homelessness>

⁶ ‘Broadly speaking, somebody is statutorily homeless if they do not have accommodation that they have a legal right to occupy, which is accessible and physically available to them (and their household) and which it would be reasonable for them to continue to live in. It would not be reasonable for someone to continue to live in their home, for example, if that was likely to lead to violence against them (or a member of their family). (Extract from DCLG’s *Statutory Homelessness Statistics*, December 2014). See the DCLG guidance note for more information.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics#rough-sleeping>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/homelessness-prevention-and-relief-england-2013-to-2014>

⁹ The Homelessness Monitor outlines different methods of estimating the number of people sleeping rough and concludes that “whereas the official estimates gave a total of under 2,000 in 2010/11 ... we have a range of alternative estimates between about 4,000 and 8,000” (page 42).