



Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government

Andrew Dilnot CBE  
UK Statistics Authority  
1 Drummond Gate  
London  
SW1V 2QQ

**Brandon Lewis MP**  
*Parliamentary Under Secretary of State*

**Department for Communities and Local  
Government**  
Eland House  
Bressenden Place  
London SW1E 5DU

Tel: 0303 444 3430  
Fax: 0303 444 3986  
E-Mail: [brandon.lewis@communities.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:brandon.lewis@communities.gsi.gov.uk)

[www.gov.uk/communities](http://www.gov.uk/communities)

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Dear Mr Dilnot,

Thank you for your letter of 23 April 2013 to the Secretary of State. I have been asked to reply as it falls within my Ministerial responsibilities.

The Department previously consulted on our changes to departmental statistics, including our explicit proposal to abolish regional-level statistics. Jil Matheson of the UKSA and Stephen Penneck from the Office of National Statistics were amongst those who responded to the consultation and their representations April 2012 were taken into account. Careful consideration was given to all the consultation responses.

The Secretary of State outlined the Government's response to the consultation in a Written Ministerial Statement to Parliament on 18 September 2013:

*"The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Mr Eric Pickles): I would like to update hon. Members on changes to the publication of the Department's statistics.*

*Today my Department has announced its response to the consultation on proposed changes to the Department's statistics. From October this year, we will no longer publish statistics at a Government office regional level. Instead the Department will plan to publish, where appropriate, statistics for local enterprise partnerships and upper-tier local authorities, complementing existing statistics by local authority.*

*The coalition Government have abolished regional government. The unelected regional assemblies/regional chambers, the Government offices for the regions, the regional FiReControl programme, the regional development agencies have been terminated, as is intended for the regional spatial strategies, subject to the strategic environment assessment process outlined in my statement of 3 September 2012, Official Report, Column 5WS.*

*The Government office regions were an inefficient tier of administration based on arbitrary boundaries. They did not reflect the areas that local residents most identified with, nor were they areas with common economic problems and market conditions, nor were they the most sensible boundaries for co-ordinating functions such as fire and resilience.*

*The continuing use of the former Government office regional boundaries no longer provides a coherent framework for assessing public policy. Many of the Government's policies now use alternative local geographies, for example local enterprise partnerships, the new homes bonus and city deals. Publishing statistics at a regional level is no longer necessary or informative, and we see little point in producing statistics at taxpayers' expense for their own sake.*

*The old regional classifications are also misleading—they fail to quantify both the pockets of deprivation that can exist within regions or the differences between rural and urban England, and there is an inconsistency of approach to the size and population of each government region. They are arbitrary lines on a map that have no resonance—in contrast to England's long-standing cities, boroughs and counties which have a real sense of local identity and popular support, dating back centuries in many cases. England has no history of regional government, whereas it does have a great tradition of local governance that this Government wish to strengthen.*

*There is also a European dimension to the regions in the form of Eurostat's nomenclature of units for territorial statistics standard (the appropriately named "NUTS regulations"). It is the view of Ministers that the NUTS<sup>1</sup> hierarchy is no longer appropriate for structural funds in England moving forward from 2014. Ministers reject the notion of a "Europe of the Regions" where nation states and national Parliaments are sidelined, and replaced with distant regional governments answerable only to a federal European super-state. Dismantling such arbitrary, unelected regional administrative structures will assist in that goal.*

*Ministers have carefully considered all the representations made in the consultation. I would note that, for the purposes of historic comparisons, nothing prevents academics and other interested parties from compiling and analysing the open local authority data by the old regional government boundaries if they wish.*

*The consultation response also notes the implementation of a new form on local authority housing statistics which reduces and rationalises the data we are asking local authorities to provide, reducing burdens on local government. It also reports on the responses on land use change statistics which confirmed their importance for monitoring the outcomes of planning policy. A copy of the response has been placed in the Library of the House."*

In this policy context, I do not see any case for re-opening this issue, given due process has been followed. The world has moved on – regional government has been abolished in England as a conscious and explicit policy of the Government, and there is no point clinging to its vestiges at taxpayers' expense.

Moreover, I believe there is a strong case for other Whitehall departments to follow our example and abolish their unnecessary regional statistics too.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brandon Lewis', written in a cursive style.

**BRANDON LEWIS MP**