



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

UK Statistics Authority
London

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Received

Sir David Norgrove
UK Statistics Authority
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LB/BJB/TRUSSSTATS

25th February 2019

Dear Sir David,

I write to you to raise a potentially misleading use of Government statistics by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, Liz Truss. On the 29th January, during an exchange on child poverty, Ms Truss said that there were "1 million fewer people...now in absolute poverty than were in 2010, including 300,000 fewer children".

However, Table 4b of the most recent Households Below Average Income statistics, published by the Department for Work and Pensions, shows a reduction of only 100,000 in the number of children in absolute poverty between the financial year 2010/11, which is the first to include mostly months in which the Conservative party has been in Government since the start of the calendar year 2010, and the financial year 2016/17, the most recent for which statistics are currently available. This is the case regardless of whether the before or after housing costs versions of the absolute poverty statistics are used.

To clarify this, I tabled the following Written Parliamentary Question:

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the contribution of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury of 29 January 2019, Official Report, Column 637, to which (a) initial and (b) final financial year she referred to in relation to official estimates of the change in the number of children in absolute child poverty.

I received the following reply from Ms Truss:

From 2009/10 to 2016/17, the number of children in absolute poverty fell from 2.5 million to 2.2 million.

In my view, the '2010' reference in Ms Truss' remarks on the 29th January would clearly be interpreted by the audience in the Chamber, and the wider public, as referring to the point at which Labour Government changed to Coalition and, subsequently, Conservative Government. As you know, this occurred on the 11th May 2010.

Ms Truss' remarks were intended to hail the claimed 300,000 reduction in absolute child poverty, during the period of Coalition and Conservative Governments, as a success on the part of her party.

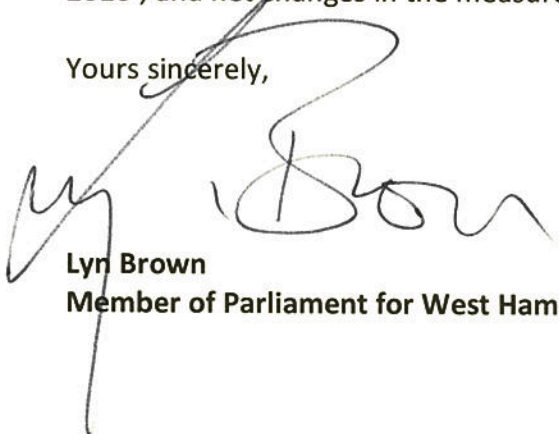
It is my understanding that the Family Resources Survey, on which, as you will know, the Households Below Average Income statistics are based, is conducted throughout the financial year and represents an overall estimate of numbers in poverty *on an average day during*, rather than *at the end of*, each financial year. Changes in the number of people in poverty that occur over the course of a financial year are, thus, reflected in the published whole-year figure. This interpretation of the Survey's methodology has been supported by a note from the Statistician for welfare and pensions in the House of Commons Library, which I attach with this letter for your information.

By including the financial year 2009-10 within the period she referred to, I would argue that Ms Truss effectively claimed credit, on behalf of her party, for a net reduction in absolute child poverty much of which is likely to have occurred during the course of the financial year 2009-10, or indeed during the first two months of the financial year 2010-11, and therefore under the Labour Government.

This alternative hypothesis is also, importantly, consistent with the strong downward trend in child poverty on the absolute measure which began during FY2007-2008 and ended, on the face of it, during FY2010-11 itself.

Firstly, I would be grateful for any guidance you could offer as to whether you consider this choice of initial year, and the '300,000' figure that resulted from it, misleading, as I do. Secondly, if, in your judgement, this is an area where the methodology of the Households Below Average Income statistics makes clear and accurate interpretation and public reference difficult, I believe it would be helpful for the UKSA to publish guidance on the best way to refer to calendar periods corresponding to different Governments, such as 'since 2010', and net changes in the measures over those periods, for these statistics.

Yours sincerely,



Lyn Brown
Member of Parliament for West Ham