Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Sandra Tudor
Head of Profession for Statistics
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
(by email)

1 July 2020

Dear Sandra

STATISTICS ON ROUGH SLEEPING SNAPSHOT IN ENGLAND

We have recently conducted our review of the compliance of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) Rough Sleeping Snapshot official statistics against the Code of Practice for Statistics

While these statistics are not National Statistics, they are important official statistics valued by users and so we have made some recommendations to support their continued development. We considered the Trustworthiness, Quality and Value of these statistics in relation to the *Code* and appreciate the positive and constructive way that the team has engaged with us during our review, especially at this particularly challenging time.

We welcome the news that new management information is being collected on the numbers of homeless and rough sleepers in England being assisted into emergency accommodation since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. We would like to recognise the positive steps being taken by MHCLG statisticians working with other MHCLG officials to determine how this management information can be best used to complement the existing statistics. We welcome the recent release of an early cut of this management information which support transparency and provides a valuable insight into nature of the current homeless landscape in England.

Within the Rough Sleeping Snapshot, we found a range of positive features that demonstrate the quality and value of the statistics:

- Developing the statistics by inviting an independent review by the Government Statistical Service's (GSS) Good Practice Team and peer review by other GSS colleagues;
- Introducing a range of valuable innovations this year, including a Reproducible Analytical Pipeline approach, a new accessible html publication on GOV.UK; a new accessible infographic; regional analysis through a new Power BI dashboard, and new insightful commentary informed by local authority (LA) contextual feedback;
- Changing the name of the bulletin to provide clarity about the 'snapshot' method used, and active engagement with national media in advance of the publication of the figures, to help ensure their appropriate interpretation;
- Working with Homeless Link to strengthen LA guidance around when it is appropriate to change the rough sleeping measurement approach used between years, and producing a new video explaining Homeless Link's role in overseeing and verifying LA estimates;
- Publication of a new technical report with accessible information about the methods and quality assurance approaches employed, an analysis of the impact of changes in LAs' measurement approaches back to 2010, and comparisons with other administrative sources in London;
- Plans to develop the demographic information collected to better understand the length of time and frequency that individuals sleep rough, and to use UK harmonised age categories;

- Plans to include new insights from other sources such as figures on rough sleepers in emergency accommodation due to COVID-19 as part of the narrative this autumn, to support emerging policy questions, and help establish whether rough sleeping has ended by the end of the current parliament in 2024.

We identified some areas for improvement that would enhance the value, quality and trustworthiness of the rough sleeping statistics:

- Enhance the value of the statistics through engagement with a broader range of users and transparently set out plans for the further development of the statistics, so that users have clear opportunities to feed in their views about how the statistics could be further improved;
- Draw on a range of published statistics, management information and other research on rough sleepers, to produce new analytical insights to more fully convey the lived experience of rough sleepers in England;
- Enhance quality, by presenting the information included in the published infographic about how the statistics *can* and *can't* be used, more upfront in the statistical bulletin;
- Review the team's QAAD data quality risk rating of 'low' due to the large number of LA data suppliers and partners representing an increased risk to data quality, and differences between some London LA's snapshot submissions and their Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) data, and consider how CHAIN and other data sources, while having their own limitations, might be used to improve the verification of LA submissions;
- Support trustworthiness, by exploring the need for data suppression to protect rough sleepers from being identified, in light of plans to collect additional demographic data;
- Specify the number of special advisers granted pre-release access to the figures and the provisional month of the forthcoming publication on the GOV.UK release calendar;
- Establish a new process for the timely publication of ad-hoc data requests for rough sleeping analyses and management information used in public statements.

Thank you for engaging effectively with us during this review. We welcome the updates on your continued collaborative work as part of the Cross-Government Homelessness Statistics Working Group. With management information now being collected across the UK on the numbers of rough sleepers and homeless helped into emergency accommodation since the start of the pandemic, alongside other administrative sources, we look forward to seeing GSS statisticians work together to more fully illustrate the complexity of the overall UK rough sleeping and homelessness picture.

Our Housing, Planning and Local Services Domain Lead will continue to engage with your team on progress in the coming months and we would welcome a progress update from you upon the next publication of these statistics.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you would like to discuss any aspects of this letter further.

I am copying this letter to Jon White and Anthony Ash, the Responsible Analysts and to Ricky Taylor, Team Leader.

Yours sincerely

Mark Pont
Assessment Programme Lead