Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

2 Marsham Street
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26 June 2018

Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation,
Office for Statistics Regulation

Dear Ed,

I am writing to bring you up to date on the developments we have made to our homelessness statistics since your assessment report of December 2015 and the plans we have for future changes. This includes a complete overhaul of our statutory homelessness statistics from April 2018, which means that we will be labelling our new statutory homelessness statistics Experimental Statistics after our final Q1 2018 National Statistics release is published on June 27th 2018[1].

We have delivered improvements on the majority of the recommendations from the report[2]; we have made significant improvements to our statistical publications building on the points identified in the assessment. We have combined the statutory homelessness and prevention and relief statistical releases into a single release to provide a more integrated picture of homelessness. We have worked with your team to develop enhanced commentary and contextual information which more clearly brings out the main messages and limitations of the data. We have also added regional codes and breakdowns to all local authority level tables we publish.

We have also made progress on the rough sleeping statistical release[3], which now includes demographic information about young people, gender and nationality, as well as providing a time series table. The release has much clearer information about the methodological issues which affect the data and the role played by the lead statistician in their production. We held a user event in November 2016 specifically on rough sleeping which asked users to help us create a plan to improve this data for the future.

A number of recommendations about improvements to the rough sleeping count and estimate process have been put forward to the Rough Sleeping and Homelessness Reduction Ministerial Taskforce, which is responsible for driving forward a cross Government strategy to meet the Government's commitments on rough sleeping. This group is made up of representatives from the third sector, local government and central government. Recommendations made by this group about how to improve the existing rough sleeping statistics are currently being explored and we will write to you again with any progress we make over the next year.

We have actively engaged with the cross-section of users and made major developments in our user engagement structures. You attended the event we held in

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[1] .gov.uk statistics release calendar
[2] UKSA assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics: Statistics on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in England (Department for Communities and Local Government)
[3] Rough sleeping in England: autumn 2017

April 2016 which asked users to comment on their priorities for future work on statutory homelessness statistics. We have acted on the clear priority expressed in this meeting to collect case level rather than just aggregated data on local authorities' statutory homelessness activity. In response to additional feedback from that event, we have created a user forum webpage where information on plans can be shared with users, and through which they can feed back comments.

The recent introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act[4] on April 3rd 2018 meant an overhaul of the existing statutory homelessness data collection system was unavoidable. This provided a one-off opportunity to transform statutory homelessness data into a case-level data collection system. We consulted with users and suppliers to design the new data collection requirement. This was released for consultation in August 2017 and finalised in January 2018. Case-level data collection commenced in April 2018. We have continued to work closely with users and suppliers throughout this transition. Any updates on development have been published on our Homelessness statistics user forum webpage[5].

The final statutory homelessness statistics[6] based on old methodology will be published on 27th June 2018. These will provide statutory homelessness statistics up to 31st March 2018. Based on the experience of Scotland who transferred to a case level system in 2001 we anticipate that there may be some impact on data quality during the transition, and we will closely monitor this. The most immediate impact to our users is that there will likely be a delay in the Q1 2018-19 release, which will move from September to the end of 2018. We will ensure any limitations on data quality are clearly communicated to users in the release. In spring 2019, we will run a user engagement event about our new statistics with users to gain feedback on the new outputs.

These changes will generate a break in some of our statistical time series, as the future data will relate to authorities' actions under the revised legislative framework. This new case level data brings exciting opportunities to produce additional breakdowns and expand the range of our current outputs. We have outlined these requirements on our user forum page and will invite stakeholders to feedback on these in our June 2018 release.

Given these changes and their implications, it would be appropriate for the new statistical release be labelled as Experimental Statistics during the transition. Once the new collection arrangements have become established and the data quality can be assured we will contact you again to review the assessment of these statistics. Based on the experiences of Scotland and Wales it is likely that it will take around twelve months for us to feel suitably assured about the quality of the new data series.

Yours sincerely,

Sandra Tudor

Head of Profession for Statistics MHCLG

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[4] Homelessness Reduction Act
[5] Homelessness statistics user forum
[6] Statutory homelessness and prevention and relief statistics