

Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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Heather Wheeler MP
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Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
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13 May 2019

Dear Heather,

Homelessness Reduction Act

Thank you for appearing before the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee on Tuesday 23 April to provide evidence on the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

It was clear from the evidence provided by charities, local government and yourself that there is a growing sense that the Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) is starting to have its intended impact, and is tangibly helping to prevent and relieve homelessness across England. Whilst there is much more to do to fully eradicate homelessness, and in particular rough sleeping, the HRA has provided a strong foundation for local authorities to make progress in this area.

However, as you are aware, there has been a longstanding concern about the reliability of the statistics used to measure homelessness. Indeed, this was an issue we highlighted prominently in our report into [Homelessness](#) in July 2016. We briefly discussed the reliability of statistics during our evidence session and we would be grateful to it explore further with you in correspondence

Following our public session, we received a letter from Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation at the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA), which is enclosed herewith. We are concerned by the issues the UKSA has raised in this letter and would appreciate your response to these.

The letter notes that inadequacies in the quality of the rough sleeping statistics collected by MHCLG has meant that these have never been designated as official 'National Statistics'. Concerningly, the UKSA explained that they were yet to see any "meaningful improvements" in the quality of these statistics in recent years.

Of particular concern to the UKSA, the latest official statistics showed a significant change between 2017 and 2018 in the way many local authorities had recorded rough sleeping, with many moving towards a street count, particularly in areas receiving additional funding under the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI). Consequently, the UKSA have called for more to be done to explore this methodological change and its effect on the published statistics.

Mr Humpherson noted that MHCLG plans to publish an impact evaluation of the RSI, which he hopes may improve understanding of the impacts of the methods changes in RSI areas. I ask that you would also share this impact evaluation with us as soon as it is available.

Importantly, it is the view of the UKSA that *"MHCLG's latest rough sleeping statistics should not be used to draw firm conclusions about recent trends in rough sleeping nor the comparability of the series and cannot yet support public claims about the success of the Rough Sleeping Initiative."*

It is in this context I am reminded of the evidence you gave during our session on 23 April. You said:

We are confident that the way of building the statistics for rough sleeping, the process that has been used since 2010, is robust and we are confident in those figures. Nobody seemed to object to the figures when, year on year, the increases were 16%, but now we have had a reduction of 2% and 19% in the 83 RSI areas. We will go through the process with the UKSA and I am sure we will come out the other side with everybody agreeing on a happy settlement. ([Q91](#))

It appears that the UKSA is less confident than you of such an agreement. Mr Humpherson told us the UKSA were *"disappointed"* by your comments which, they said, *"appeared to fail to appreciate our criticisms of the rough sleeping statistics, through their assertions about the statistics robustness and that they were comparing like with like"*.

In light of this, we note that the UKSA have called on the Government to:

- Provide further clarity on your plans to produce better statistics on rough sleeping, to publish those plans and to provide clarity about the impact that the apparent change in rough sleeping methods used by some councils may have had on the comparability of the statistical series; and
- Confirm that the Government is suitably assured about the quality of the new statutory homelessness data that it is collecting.

In addition to responding to the UKSA with this information at the first available opportunity, I would be grateful if you could also respond to this letter outlining the Government's proposed plan of action for improving the quality of rough sleeping statistics. It would be helpful to receive this response before the Whitsun recess.

Thank you, as ever, for your ongoing support for the work of the Committee.

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

Clive Betts MP
Chair, Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee