



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

**Mrs Heather Wheeler MP**  
Minister for Housing and Homelessness

*Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local  
Government*  
Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Clive Betts MP  
Housing, Communities and Local Government  
Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
Greater London  
SW1P 3JA

Tel: 0303 444 4794  
Email: [heather.wheeler@communities.gov.uk](mailto:heather.wheeler@communities.gov.uk)

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

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Dear Clive,

31 May 2019

Thank you for your letter of 13 May regarding the communication you received from Ed Humpherson (UK Statistics Authority) concerning the recent Housing Communities and Local Government Committee evidence session on the Homelessness Reduction Act, and the Rough Sleeping Statistics. I apologise for my delay in replying.

I was pleased to give evidence to the Select Committee on this subject and am glad that you agree that the Homelessness Reduction Act is effectively and tangibly helping to prevent and relieve homelessness.

As you know, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) produce a range of statistics that help to build up a broad picture of homelessness and rough sleeping across the country. These include quarterly statistics on the broad characteristics and circumstances of households owed a statutory homelessness duty and an annual single night snapshot of rough sleeping. I have focused this reply on the latter return.

You point out that these rough sleeping statistics do not have National Statistics status, but many valid statistical returns are not badged as National Statistics, but this does not mean that they are unreliable. As you know, the statutory homelessness statistics have been completely overhauled following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in April 2018. The new Homelessness Case Level Information Collection (H-CLIC) data system collects much more detailed data on households, actions offered to assist them, and their outcomes. Once the new statutory homelessness statistics have become established and data quality can be assured, we will contact the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA), to discuss reviewing the assessment of both homelessness and rough sleeping statistics together. Experiences in Scotland and Wales suggest it is likely to take around 12 months for us to feel suitably assured of the new data series' quality.

Accurately counting or estimating the number of people sleeping rough is an inherently difficult task and we have never claimed that the snapshot is a total figure of all those sleeping on our streets in the year. The methodology, which has always included both counts and estimates (whichever is more appropriate in each area), was developed alongside local authorities and the voluntary sector and aligns with the standard practice in many parts of the world including Canada, the United States, France and Tokyo. We remain confident that this snapshot methodology is a valid and robust approach to assessing the number of people sleeping rough on a single night. It has been consistent since 2010 and we are assured in the comparability of the time series in assessing the level, and changes, of rough sleeping on a single night.

Further, the quality of all returns is reinforced by Homeless Link's independent verification and the significant voluntary sector and local partner involvement in every instance<sup>1</sup>. As previously recommended by the UKSA, MHCLG also publishes the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) data for London alongside the Rough Sleeping Statistics to give a wider picture of rough sleeping in the capital. Although it is not feasible to roll out a system like CHAIN across the county, we are encouraging areas with higher numbers of rough sleepers to improve their year-round data collection. As committed to in the Rough Sleeping Strategy, we continue to work collaboratively with local authorities to develop improved homelessness data and outcomes that can measure progress in reducing rough sleeping and homelessness.

An increased number of authorities did conduct street counts for the annual snapshot in 2018, and as you will be aware, it is local authorities not central government, that decide which approach to use. Alongside local partners such as outreach teams and voluntary organisations, and based on Homeless Link's advice, authorities decide how to capture the most accurate figure of those sleeping rough on a single night. There are a number of reasons why a local authority may choose to conduct a street count over an estimate. For example, more comprehensive outreach work (such as that funded under the Rough Sleeping Initiative), would generate more intelligence about where rough sleepers can be found, and therefore significantly improve the accuracy of a count. Street counts can also promote large-scale positive engagement, since unlike an estimate, they provide an opportunity to support those found.

As has been communicated to the UKSA in our letter published on 21 May, a number of improvements have been made to the collection of rough sleeping statistics since 2015<sup>2</sup>. This includes incorporating demographic information on age, gender and nationality as well as the time series table. Whilst we are not planning any major changes to the single night snapshot methodology, we have a programme of work underway to improve the broader evidence base for homelessness and rough sleeping that is also detailed in the letter to UKSA.

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<sup>1</sup> In the 2018 statistics, 75% of local authorities consulted 5 or more different agencies.

<sup>2</sup> MHCLG response to letters on rough sleeping: <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/mhclg-response-letters-rough-sleeping/>

We continue to increase our intelligence on homelessness and rough sleeping; in particular with our programme of evaluations and new research, and the establishment of local data pilots (expected summer 2019) that will seek to improve the data collected by a wide range of services which people who sleep rough access.

Our impact evaluation of the Rough Sleeping Initiative (RSI) will consider any effect that the initiative has had on the number of rough sleepers in funded areas. This will assess any effect changes from estimates to counts could have on the figures. I hope to publish this in the summer. The concurrent process evaluation, that is being conducted by Ipsos MORI, will help to provide a fuller picture of the effect RSI funding has had on rough sleeping across England. Until we have confirmation of the impact of our initiative, we continue to present the facts as they are – that across RSI areas a 19% decrease was seen in those sleeping rough on a single night, compared to an overall 2% decrease across the country, and a 41% increase amongst areas that had not received RSI funding.

I hope I have sufficiently answered the questions raised, and as always, appreciate your dedication to homelessness work - which is shared by myself. I look forward to future discussions between MHCLG and the UKSA that will further aid our collective ambition for comprehensive homelessness data.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Heather Wheeler', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**MRS HEATHER WHEELER MP**