

Rt Hon John Healey MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Sir David Norgrove  
UK Statistics Authority  
1 Drummond Gate  
London  
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Dear Sir David

### **Rough sleeping statistics**

The large rise in rough sleeping since 2010 is properly a matter of national concern, for the public and in Parliament. However, we are hindered in tackling this crisis by poor Government statistics which significantly under-estimate the scale of the problem and do not provide a reliable measure of the change in rough sleeping over time.

The Government's inaction on this matter suggests they are happy for undercounting to continue, to help conceal the scale of rough sleeping in this country.

I am therefore writing to seek your help in securing the improvement of these vital statistics, so that they can be the basis for better Government policy.

I know the defects in the rough sleeping statistics are well-known to the UKSA and in December 2015 you stripped these statistics of their designation as National Statistics. However, over three years on, it appears that the Government has still not acted to ensure these statistics merit re-designation, despite your 2015 report recording that the department "is expected to report its completed actions to the Authority by July 2016".

Over these three years, rapidly rising rough sleeping has been a major issue of national political and public debate, so this do-nothing stance by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is deeply regrettable.

It must be because of a lack of will, not lack of skill as I know the diligence and professionalism of the department's statisticians. If Ministers made rough sleeping a real priority, they'd get the statistics sorted out.

While I appreciate there have been some minor improvements to the published statistics, and councils, voluntary organisations and the department's statisticians have sought to make the best of the current approach, there remain, in my view, major flaws which require major changes.



First, it is clear that as a measure of the number of people who are sleeping rough in England, these statistics seriously under-estimate the scale of the problem, to an extent that detracts from their use in public debate.

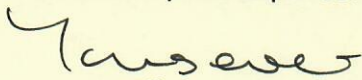
We know this from the far more comprehensive CHAIN data in London, which records that 7,484 people were seen sleeping rough in the last full financial year - almost six times the figure in MHCLG's published statistics of 1,283. Separately, Herriot-Watt University have estimated that 11,000 people are sleeping rough in England, more than double the figure in MHCLG's published statistics.

Secondly, the year-on-year changes in the method of collecting the data are not reliable because of the differences in the way in which data is collected. My analysis of the Government's published figures shows that 93 councils changed their methodology for assessment of rough sleeping numbers between 2017 and 2018 alone.

I would therefore be grateful to know the latest view of the UKSA on this matter, and in particular on the following points.

- Given that more than three years has passed since the UKSA's decision that the rough sleeping statistics do not merit the status of National Statistics, what explanation has the UKSA been given by Ministers for the delay in regaining this designation? Has the department given you a timeframe in which they will seek to do this?
- In light of rival data sources that suggest the Government's published statistics seriously underestimate the scale of rough sleeping, would the UKSA investigate whether there are good statistical grounds for extending the CHAIN methodology of counting rough sleeping across the country, rather than just in London as at present?
- Would the UKSA consider looking again at the comparability of the Government's rough sleeping statistics over time, to ensure that recorded changes are not unduly affected by changes in methodology from year to year?

I am grateful to you and your colleagues for your attention to these concerns, and I look forward to your response.



John Healey MP  
Shadow Secretary of State for Housing

