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**Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir David Norgrove**

The Baroness Grender MBE  
House of Lords  
London  
SW1A 0PW

15 December 2017

Dear Lady Grender

You wrote to the Authority on Wednesday, about statements made by the Prime Minister regarding homelessness. You asked specifically if we could confirm whether the Prime Minister's suggestion that "statutory homelessness peaked under the Labour Government and is down by more than 50% since then" was supported by official statistics.

Our view is that the Prime Minister has quoted the published statutory homelessness statistics correctly. Peak statutory homelessness was recorded as 35,770 in Q3 2003, and as 15,290 in Q3 2017, as set out in the note by the Office of Statistics Regulation, attached.

You will know from your past correspondence with the Authority on homelessness that the picture provided by homelessness statistics for England is more complex than it should be. The note attached also sets out key issues with the interpretation and future development of these statistics.

Yours Sincerely



**Sir David Norgrove**

## Note by the Office for Statistics Regulation

There are different statistics which measure different aspects of homelessness in England. The two main measures are the statutory homelessness statistics, and statistics on prevention and relief activities undertaken by Local Authorities. Both are published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).<sup>1,2</sup>

For households which are unintentionally homeless and in a priority need category (such as having dependent children), the local authority has a ‘main duty’ to secure settled accommodation, and to ensure that suitable temporary accommodation is provided until settled accommodation is available. These households are referred to as *statutorily homeless acceptances*.

Local authorities also have a duty to provide free advice and assistance to all households threatened with homelessness. Local authorities often go beyond this to proactively attempt to *prevent* or *relieve* homelessness. *Prevention* enables households to remain in their existing accommodation or obtain an alternative for at least the next 6 months. *Relief* refers to positive actions to secure accommodation for households that have already become homeless. These actions are discretionary and thus approaches vary considerably between authorities.

The Prime Minister’s statement that “statutory homelessness peaked under the Labour Government and is down by more than 50% since then”<sup>3</sup> appears to have been drawn from DCLG’s statutory homelessness statistics.

Our assessment is that the Prime Minister has referred to and quoted the published statutory homelessness statistics correctly.

Chart 3 of the most recently published statutory homelessness statistics (captured below) shows that statutory homeless acceptances have fallen by more than 50% since their peak in 2003. The accompanying commentary within the bulletin (also below) explains that this has been driven by the strengthening of prevention activities and the provision of housing options services to local residents.

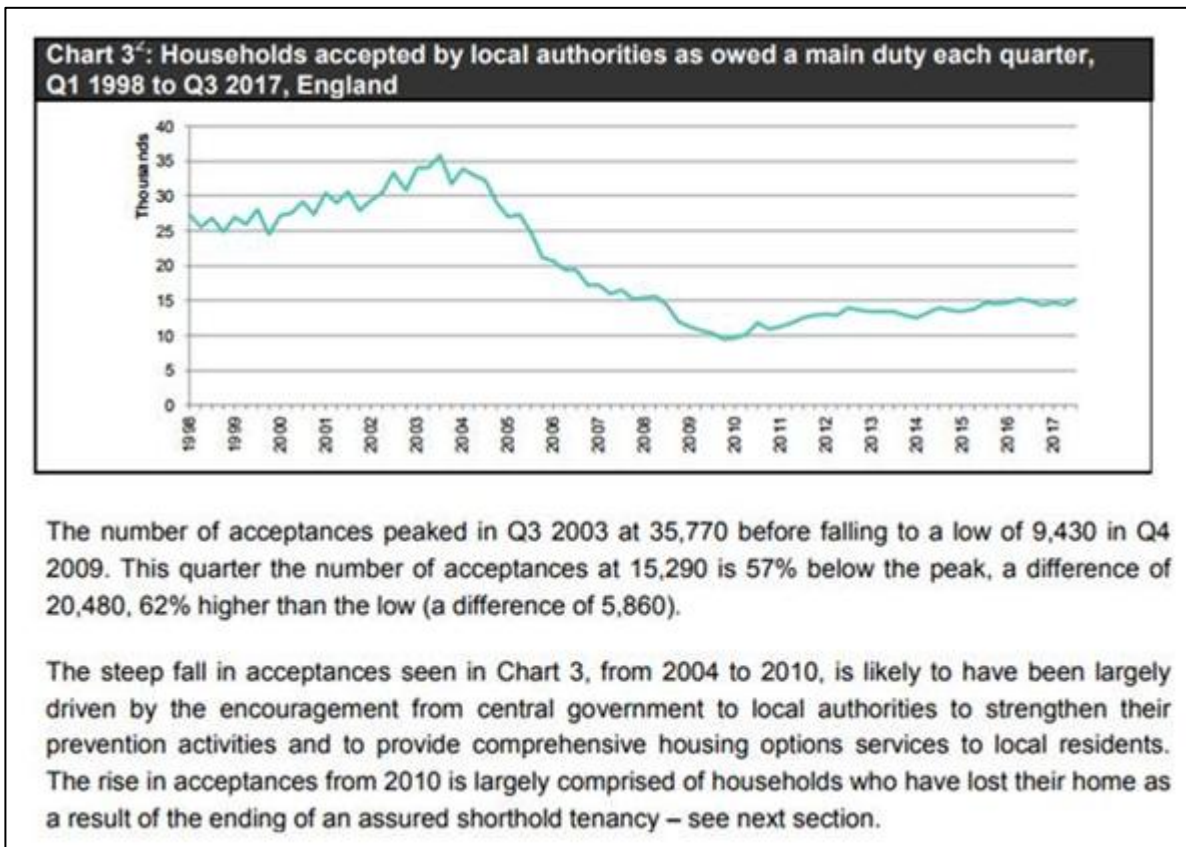
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<sup>1</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government (February 2013): [Homelessness data: notes and definitions](#)

<sup>2</sup> DCLG also publishes statistics on rough sleepers based on single night snapshots of the number of people sleeping rough in local authority areas, though these account for a relatively small proportion of all those that might be considered homeless when compared to the statutory and prevention and relief measures.

<sup>3</sup> Hansard (13 December 2017): [Volume 663](#)

Figure 1: Excerpt from DCLG release (Chart 3)



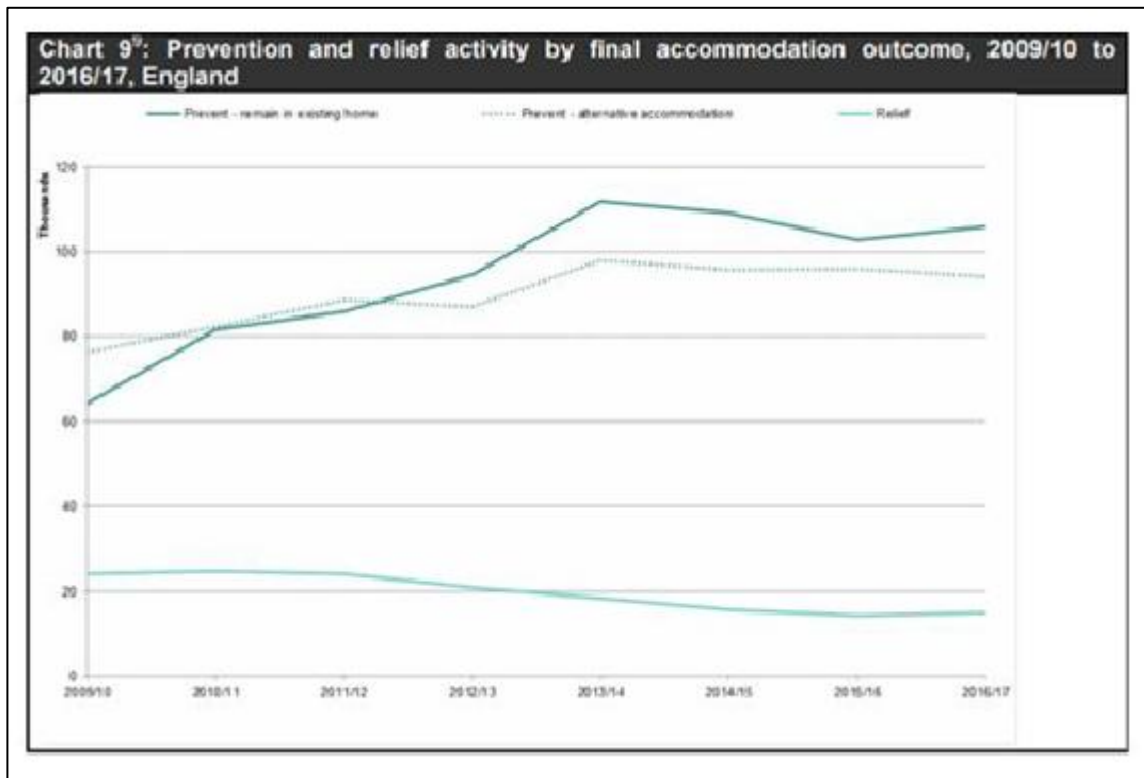
The Office for Statistics Regulation's assessment report, published in December 2015<sup>4</sup>, and subsequent correspondence with Baroness Grender<sup>5</sup>, pointed out that to provide a more complete picture of homelessness it is necessary to look not just at statutory homelessness but also at the prevention and relief activities carried out by local authorities.

Chart 9 from the most recently published statistics, below, shows the prevention and relief measure.

<sup>4</sup> Office for Statistics Regulation (December 2015): [Assessment Report 320: Statistics on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in England](#)

<sup>5</sup> Office for Statistics Regulation (February 2017): [Letter from Mr Ed Humpherson to Baroness Grender](#)

Figure 2: Excerpt from DCLG release (Chart 9)



In terms of improving the statistics, we expect DCLG to develop a more comprehensive measure of homelessness to better inform public debate. DCLG plans to develop their homelessness statistics using information collected from a new case level system for recording and tracking homeless households, which is being introduced with the Homelessness Reduction Act from next April. DCLG has informed us that the statistics developed from this system will cover a broader range of households, including all those receiving homelessness assistance from their local authority, rather than as now, focusing on those that authorities are currently legally obliged to help under the statutory definition.

These developments are encouraging and we anticipate that they will lead to a better informed public discussion on this important issue.

**Ed Humpherson**

Director General for Regulation  
Office for Statistics Regulation  
14 December 2017