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

Rt Hon John Healey MP  
Shadow Housing Secretary  
(via email)

10 March 2020

Dear Mr Healey

Thank you for your letter of 26 February in which you suggest that official measures of rough sleeping undercount the actual number of rough sleepers.

The figures collected by the BBC and the official estimates published by Government are measuring different aspects of rough sleeping. As you note in your letter, Government figures focus on the number of people sleeping rough at a given point in time. The BBC analysis attempts to count the number of different people who slept rough over the period of a year. Both measures no doubt have their uses, much as it is useful to know how many people are unemployed at any one time as well as how many people over a year experience periods of unemployment. It is not surprising that in each case the snapshot is a lower figure than that for the measure over a longer period. It is worth noting that the BBC points to some uncertainties in its analysis, including the potential for double counting the same rough sleepers in different local authorities over the year, and limited annual data for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

You will be aware that we have previously had cause to seek assurances about the comparability of the series produced by MHCLG<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, official statistics should aim to offer a richer and better integrated picture of rough sleeping that goes beyond any single measure, and which conveys the dynamics of rough sleeping. I am encouraged that statistics producers across all four UK countries are now working together to a joint work plan to enhance the available range of UK homelessness and rough sleeping statistics. I expect the statisticians to consider the management information now being collected in England under the Rough Sleeping Initiative as part of this work, alongside other administrative sources. Statisticians have also committed to further engagement to ensure that any new statistics produced are able to meet users' needs.

Separately, the Office for Statistics Regulation will be carrying out planned compliance checks on the existing official rough sleeping statistics produced by MHCLG and the Welsh Government, as part of its regulatory work programme. The findings of OSR's reviews will be published in the spring.

Yours sincerely,



**Sir David Norgrove**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/rough-sleeping-initiative-evaluation/>