Ministry of Housing,
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Statutory Homelessness data
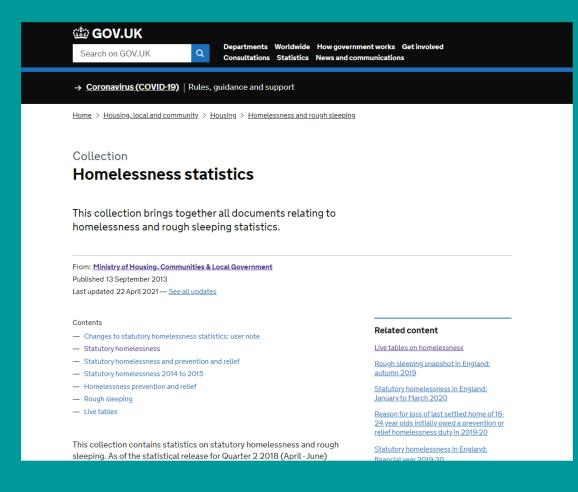
User and data provider survey results

May 2021

Introduction

The Homelessness Statistics team ran two surveys to collect feedback on how MHCLG collects and publishes statutory homelessness statistics. These surveys were open for five weeks, and received 46 responses in total.

The team wanted to find out how people use the statistics and what the barriers are to providing quality data.

This will enable them to make sure the statistics continue to be fit for purpose and will help them focus on specific areas to improve the data collection process.
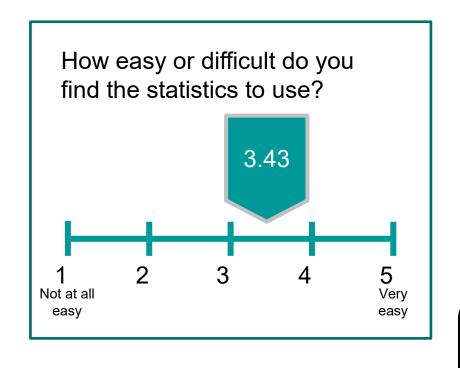
Using the published statistics

What are the statistics being used for?

- Assessing performance

- Benchmarking against other LAs and understanding regional trends

- Reporting outcomes and showing progress

The statistics are generally easy to use, however the presentation could be more visual and allow easier comparison

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How easy or difficult do you find the statistics to use?

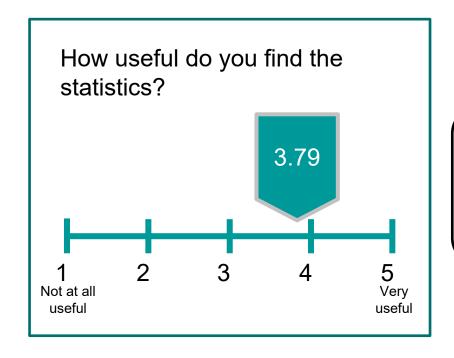3.43

1 — Not at all easy
2
3
4
5 — Very easy

They are easy to find and easy to use.

It would be good to have data in a more visual format.

Ideally the drop down would enable me to select more than one authority at a time

The mixed methodology makes it difficult to use… there are a lot of caveats in comparing areas and years with different methodologies.

The statistics are useful for comparative performance measurement and identifying gaps in provision, but could allow more detailed interrogation

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How useful do you find the statistics?

3.79

1 — Not at all useful
2
3
4
5 — Very useful

They are our primary resources to measure performance against others

Really useful to support identifying gaps in provision for certain groups

We get lots of FOI requests […] for stats on homelessness. Sometimes you are looking for something quite bespoke [which is] available on HCLIC but unfortunately is not possible to derive from the publicly available spreadsheets.
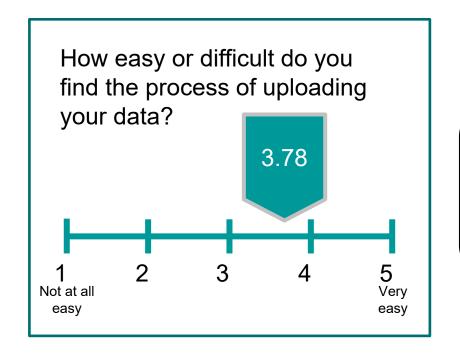
How can we improve our statistics?

- Allow users to access different benchmarking configuration, e.g. selecting more than one LA, selecting different time periods

- Ability to download the raw data and feed it into their own reporting tools

- Reduce the elapsed time between data collection and publication

Submitting data

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How easy or difficult do you find the process of uploading your data?

3.78

1
Not at all easy

2

3

4

5
Very easy

The initial upload of XLS data from our software is incredibly easy

The process of presenting the file to Delta is straight forward enough although the time it takes to process the load is long

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However, the way the system handles errors, and the process for resolving them, causes problems

If there are any errors it is not easy to find the exact records that contain the error, nor is it obvious what are acceptable answers to put in those fields.

It's also borderline impossible to edit individual records to fix problems; whenever I've tried to edit a single record the form generates more errors than the normal submission process, and the error messages also don't follow basic logic (e.g. telling me a drop down must be Answer X when the drop down is already Answer X).

Data entry requirements are not always well understood by those who are progressing cases

> I think the quality of the data is affected by how the questions appear within the case management system […]
> Officers that progress cases may input an incorrect value/inappropriate value into a field because they are doing their best to answer a question but they are unfamiliar with the requirements/meanings of some HCLIC questions.

How can the guidance be improved?

- Easier to access guidance within the context of the submission itself.

- DELTA should be more intuitive to use and not require extensive guidance to do so.

- Include examples of H-CLIC errors and how to resolve them.

- Use plain English rather than codes for error messaging.

There can be a mismatch between capabilities of the provider's software and the format required by MHCLG's system

The problem in my own organisation is around the rough sleeper data which is not captured in the same way.

Our software does not have all the functionality that we need to record our placements and manage charges and payments, as a result of which we tend to rely on other systems to manage our Temporary Accommodation placements.

I have to cross reference the figures submitted with several different sources of data held by our organisation and when these figures don't match, I have to amend the homelessness software and resubmit the HCLIC data.

There is a delay to getting access to QA reports after submission, which is problematic if there are errors to resolve.

Having to wait until the following Tuesday after making changes to access the up-to-date QA reports is also time consuming, especially if further changes are required and a further wait is required.

Most difficult to resolve are the [errors] generated exclusively by the QA report, as these only come up a few days after we've made the submission and take so long for the team to work back through the cases, re-enter data, and then we have to wait another 3-5 days for the QA report to be refreshed to ensure that the issue has been adequately resolved.

- Easier to identify and resolve errors.

- More intuitive to use, and clearer guidance that can be accessed in the context it is needed.

- Quicker access to data that has been submitted.

- When making changes, consider how to communicate them well so that people know what is changing.

Please tell us what you think!

Email: homelessnessstats@communities.gov.uk