



Department for
Communities and
Local Government



Social Housing Lettings, England

Quality Report

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods, and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.



Department for
Communities and
Local Government



Social Housing Lettings, England

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October 2015
Department for Communities and Local Government

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Summary

This Quality Report provides a brief summary of key issues relating to quality that users of the annual statistical report *Social Housing Lettings, England (Social Lettings)* need to be aware of. The report begins with the purpose and background of *Social Lettings* and then provides a summary of work undertaken in 2014 and 2015 to improve and enhance the quality of the *Social Lettings* statistics. The 2014/15 statistical release carries the National Statistics badge, following the assessment by the UK Statistics Authority in 2014.

The report covers all dimensions of quality defined by the European Statistical System (ESS) as recommended by the Code of Practice for National Statistics.

- **Relevance** – This section discusses work undertaken to ensure that *Social Lettings* meets user needs.
- **Accuracy and reliability** – This section summarises the main sources of bias and other errors in the statistics that impact on the degree of closeness between published estimates and true population values.
- **Timeliness and punctuality** – This section provides information on headline and all other data releases on *Social Lettings*, and considers the trade-off between timeliness and other quality dimensions.
- **Accessibility and clarity** – This section covers the accessibility and clarity of *Social Lettings* outputs, including the release and tables and other supporting documentation.
- **Coherence and comparability** – This section explains how *Social Lettings* monitors and reports on coherence and comparability of the statistics over time, harmonisation with ONS standards, reporting of geographic variables, and information on related housing data.

1. Introduction

Primary purpose

- 1.1 The Department for Communities and Local Government's annual statistical report *Social Housing Lettings, England* (*Social Lettings*) presents National Statistics on new lettings of the existing social housing stock owned by local authorities and private registered providers of social housing in England.

A brief history of *Social Lettings*

- 1.2 *Social Lettings* replaced the department's previous *Social Housing Lettings and Sales in England* publication from the 2012/13 reporting period onwards.
- 1.3 The department produces *Social Lettings* (and *Social Housing Sales, England* (*Social Sales*)) using administrative data collected from private registered providers and local authorities via the COntinuous REcording of Lettings and Sales in Social Housing in England (CORE) system.
- 1.4 CORE was set up in 1989 and in previous years was governed by the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), now part of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), the national housing and regeneration agency for England and the regulator for social housing providers in England. TSA required private registered providers to submit social housing lettings and sales information to support its regulatory function. TSA extended CORE to include the local authority sector in 2004. The project governance also included the National Housing Federation.
- 1.5 In 2010/11 project governance for CORE was novated to the department, due to changes in the regulatory function of the TSA and budgetary considerations. The CORE data collection programme was deemed an important evidence base for the department's housing policy so the department took over the funding of CORE and the responsibility for managing the CORE system.
- 1.6 From 2010, the department added the CORE social housing lettings data to the single data list, a list of all the datasets that local government must submit to central government. It remains a regulatory requirement for private registered providers and local authority stock holders registered with the HCA to supply the data as per the Tenancy Standard defined in

the HCA's regulatory standards¹. For those who are not registered with the HCA, submissions are voluntary.

- 1.7 The statistics team in the department has overall responsibility for CORE but TNS² has held the contract for administering the CORE system since 2009. The current contract runs until October 2015.
- 1.8 The department will be bringing the CORE collection in-house before the current contract with TNS expires. The new system will be available from 12th October 2015 and further information for stakeholders and data providers, including detailed guidance on how to use the new system and on the key differences from the current TNS system, have been published on both the TNS and DCLG websites.

1

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419209/Tenancy_Standard_2015.pdf

2 <http://www.tnsglobal.com/>

2.Relevance

'The degree to which statistical outputs meet users' needs'³

Scope of release

- 2.1 Information for 2014/15 in this release reflects data given by providers for the year ending 31 March 2015. All data are submitted by private registered providers and local authorities through the on-line Continuous Recording system (CORE), which also collects information for sales of self-contained dwellings and re-sales of any part-owned dwellings (shared ownership) from private registered providers. The 2014/15 sales data from CORE is reported through the department's *Social Sales* statistical release, due for publication in autumn 2015.
- 2.2 Data for *Social Lettings* is collected through the 'Lettings' log through CORE. It covers general needs and supported housing lettings, and includes social rent lettings as well as affordable rent lettings.
- 2.3 CORE only records new and permanent general needs lettings. This excludes mutual exchanges, conversions of starter or introductory tenancies to assured or secure tenancies, successions by assignment, and temporary general needs housing. Temporary lettings are only included if a household moves into supported housing. A full list of exclusions can be found in the CORE guidance manual available from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rents-lettings-and-tenancies>

Main uses of the data

- 2.4 CORE is unique in providing attribute information of record level data, enabling in-depth analysis and construction of small area estimates. It is the only source of social lettings data that allows detailed distributional analysis across variables.
- 2.5 There are a wide range of users of CORE data both internal and external to the department.
- 2.6 Social housing lettings statistics and the underlying CORE datasets inform national housing policy in areas such as the Affordable Homes Programme, which aims to increase the supply of new affordable homes in England, and social housing allocations policy. Data on housing costs,

³<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/best-practice/gss-best-practice/gss-quality-good-practice/quality-measurement-and-reporting-guidance/index.html>

affordability and the housing benefit propensity of new tenants is used to inform modelling on the value for money and the housing benefit impacts of investment in new affordable housing, and was essential in the analysis leading up to the welfare reform. CORE data was recently used to inform the new initiatives of Right to Move and the introduction of starter homes.

- 2.7 The Homes and Communities Agency uses data at different spatial levels and views it as an invaluable data source to inform their policy development. Social Housing Lettings data allows for a better understanding of the socio-economic and demographic makeup of affordable housing customers by tenure and understanding of local housing markets and affordable housing products. For example, the income and housing costs data facilitates the consideration of affordability levels by tenure, and migration between tenures and areas can also indicate where there is differing demand.
- 2.8 Social housing providers use the data to understand the market for social housing and benchmark their own performance. Local government also use these data to inform their Strategic Housing Market Assessments that form part of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 2.9 The social housing statistics are also used by academics, researchers, charities and the wider public to understand social housing issues. Some of these users use the National Statistics in conjunction with the underlying administrative data available from the UK Data Archive⁴.

Key statistical concepts

- 2.10 The population or key units of interest in *Social Lettings* are residential households let a social house and the dwellings let. A dwelling is defined as a self-contained unit of accommodation (normally a house or flat) where all the rooms and amenities (i.e. kitchen, bath/shower room and WC) are for the exclusive use of the household(s) occupying them. A household is defined as one person living alone, or a group of people (not necessarily related) living at the same address who share cooking facilities AND a living room or sitting room or dining area.
- 2.11 The *Social Lettings* release provides key definitions about the concepts used for the release. A full set of definitions can be found in the CORE guidance manual for 2014/15 available from:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rents-lettings-and-tenancies>

⁴ <http://ukdataservice.ac.uk/get-data/how-to-access>

User engagement

- 2.12 The department has a published strategy for engaging with users of its official statistics with the stated aim to ‘establish and nurture a mutually beneficial partnership between the producers and users of its statistics’, accessible at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/engagement-strategy-to-meet-the-needs-of-statistics-users>
- 2.13 Users of CORE statistics are encouraged to provide feedback on how these statistics are used and how well they meet user needs. The CORE statistics team is keen to receive comments so we can continually improve our statistical release and make it as relevant and useful as possible. To provide comments, please e-mail CORE@communities.gsi.gov.uk.
- 2.14 Users who used to access the record level CORE data through a TNS licence responded to a questionnaire in late 2013, describing how they used the CORE data and why it was important to their work. A summary of these responses is provided from the following page: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rents-lettings-and-tenancies>
- 2.15 Existing data requirements are reviewed annually and any potential new data needs are considered against the burden on data suppliers, in an open and transparent process. Throughout the year, the department also maintains a list of any issues raised by the users and suppliers of the data and feeds those into the review. Some changes are made because of new operational needs of registered providers.
- 2.16 Changes for the following financial year are usually agreed around 3 months in advance of the new data collection going live in April. This allows data providers to implement the required changes in their internal management systems to provide the required data. Usually, the systems are managed by software company providers and some training and guidance is provided to these companies during the period of implementation.
- 2.17 The statistics team consulted with government analysts, policy customers, and representatives of data providers and external organisations in autumn 2013. The purpose of the meetings was to inform the content of the 2014/15 CORE data collection and the content of the 2014/15 *Social Lettings* release. The 2014/15 CORE forms are published on the CORE webpages alongside the forms for the current collection year (2015/16). Changes from the forms for the previous collection year are highlighted in red.

- 2.18 In 2014, the statistics team streamlined the process for user engagement for local authorities, to raise the profile of the data collection and to ensure that user requirements are being met. This was done through the aligning of the data review for each new collection cycle with the Central and Local Information Partnerships (housing) meetings.
- 2.19 In 2014, the option to officially propose changes to CORE for the following collection year (i.e. 2015-16) was extended for the first time to external users of the statistical release, through providing the change request form on the DCLG website where users will see it as they access the statistical release: <https://www.gov.uk/rents-lettings-and-tenancies-data-notes-and-definitions-for-local-authorities-and-data-analysts>.
- 2.20 Throughout the development of the new in-house data collection system, data providers were given opportunities to test the functionality of the system, comment on them, and suggest improvements. Their feedback was used to improve the functionality of the system and make it easier for them to use. By using their feedback it is hoped that the data collected through the new system continues to be of a high quality.

DCLG Statistics User Engagement Day

- 2.21 The statistics team ran a session at a department wide Statistics User Engagement Day in November 2013. The purpose of the event was:
- to seek views to inform the department's priorities and future work programme that will ensure we make the best use of our resources
 - provide a forum for greater transparency of the department's statistics and the processes behind their production and to obtain feedback on methodology or outputs, including where we can reduce or cease those no longer required
 - seek views on the coherence, scope and dissemination of statistical publications
- 2.22 63 external visitors attended the CORE session on this day, including participants from local authorities, housing trusts, academics, third sector organisations and other government departments.
- 2.23 The user engagement day provided users with the opportunity to participate in workshops and share their experiences of the various statistics.

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- 2.24 Due to the types of users and data suppliers that attended the user engagement day – mainly central and local government, the focus was on the supply and use of the CORE social housing lettings data rather than the published National Statistics.
- 2.25 Statisticians reviewed the responses and have implemented changes where possible:
- TNS are prioritising more targeted and strategic communications to encourage the relevant stakeholders, within data provider organisations, to address any data collection short comings or non-responses, which will reduce data gaps or data inconsistencies.
 - TNS are also addressing some of the provider and software company related issues to assess what further changes can be made going forward, over and above the already improved lead time of the log review process and subsequent eCORE specification timings.
 - TNS has also published the results of its own data usage survey, which is now on the CORE website⁵.
- 2.26 We expect that there may be other issues of concern to external users, which were not picked up in the time available at the User Engagement Day. All attendees were encouraged to send any further feedback after the event. The statistics team responsible for *Social Lettings* will work with other DCLG statistics teams and cross-government to facilitate further opportunities for user engagement.

⁵<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rents-lettings-and-tenancies>

3 Accuracy and reliability

*'The degree of closeness between an estimate and the true value'*⁶

Overview of methodology

- 3.1 All data are submitted through the on-line Continuous Recording system (CORE) by private registered providers and local authorities. CORE is a database where individual property lettings are recorded, alongside information about the property and the tenants. The data is entered onto 'logs' (one per letting) or as a bulk upload through a facility called eCORE. Entries are automatically validated as they are uploaded.
- 3.2 The contractor TNS are responsible for collecting data through CORE and validating the data. In 2014 the department reviewed the process of quality assurance of the *Social Lettings* statistics and agreed a Quality Plan with the CORE contractors (TNS). The Quality Plan sets out roles and responsibilities for quality assurance throughout the process, from establishing and agreeing the new templates for data collection until the submission of the annual reports and live tables to support the *Social Lettings* release. The Quality Plan also establishes quality indicators for each stage of the process. DCLG's CORE project manager monitors the progress of these quality indicators.
- 3.3 The process of weighting and imputation of data is done by statisticians in the department. In 2013 the ONS Methodology Advisory Service were commissioned to advise on improving the methodology to derive the *Social Lettings* statistics, with funding from the UK Statistics Authority Quality Improvement Fund. The main methodology changes were to estimate population totals for social housing lettings, by applying improved weighting methods, and address item non-response for the household characteristics (such as age, ethnicity and economic status) by imputing for missing values.

Imputation

- 3.4 Some of the questions on the CORE questionnaire are not compulsory. In particular, data on household characteristics (age, sex, economic status, ethnicity and nationality) may not be available to the housing officer or may be refused by the tenant.

⁶ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/best-practice/gss-best-practice/gss-quality-good-practice/quality-measurement-and-reporting-guidance/index.html>

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- 3.5 As recommended by the ONS Methodology Advisory review, the department uses the Canadian Census Editing and Imputation System (CanCEIS) software to impute data using a ‘donor imputation’ approach. This involves identifying records that are similar to the records with missing data. The software then randomly chooses a record (the ‘donor record’) from the set of records with the closest data for the non-missing variables and copies the data for the missing variables from the donor record.
- 3.6 Imputation is carried out to address item level non-response of key data on tenant characteristics, for both local authorities and private registered providers (with local authorities having a higher level of non-response). The imputation is done separately for general needs and for supported housing, to reflect the different demographic profiles of their tenants. The imputation is done in two steps, imputing first age, sex and economic status, and then nationality and ethnicity, on the missing variables for the household reference person.
- 3.7 Income data is not imputed. Income has a higher non-response rate, particularly amongst the elderly. Therefore the data was deemed to be too incomplete and unreliable as imputed results may lead to biased estimates. Instead, to improve completeness of income data the department is working with TNS to encourage a higher response rate from providers.
- 3.8 The imputation methodology was refined further from 2013/14, by building in constraints to donor variables that prevent using donor data that would have not normally have been accepted through the usual validation process.
- 3.9 The imputation process uses ONS UK area classifications to group local authorities into clusters. The cluster groups are one of the variables used to judge records’ similarity. The ONS uses Census data to inform these clusters and the cluster groups were updated with 2011 Census data in July 2015. From 2014/15, the imputation process used for *Social Lettings* has been updated to use the updated cluster groups. Previously, the process used cluster groups based on 2001 Census data.

Weighting

- 3.10 In order to obtain representative estimates at the national level, weights are applied to adjust for record level non-response by local authorities. CORE has always captured all lettings by private registered providers in England; however local authorities have participated in CORE since

- 2004/5 on a voluntary basis. In the first year, only 24% of stock-holding local authorities participated, but the number of authorities participating has steadily increased since then with some data being submitted for all stock holding authorities (excluding Isles of Scilly) for the first time in 2013/14. Some data was continued to be submitted for all these authorities in 2014/15.
- 3.11 Local authority weights are calculated by reference to the total number of lettings reported to the *Local Authority Housing Statistics* (LAHS) return. For the most recent year of data, provisional estimates are used as final LAHS data will not be published until later in the year.
 - 3.12 Weights are calculated for groups of similar local authorities, where these groups are defined by the [ONS UK area classifications](#). For the publication of 2014/15 *Social Lettings* the area classifications based on data from the 2011 Census were used. The area classification from the 2011 Census for local authority districts was published for the first time by the ONS in July 2015 so this was used for weighting 2014/15 data and revising the weights for 2013/14 data. Prior to the publication of 2011 Census area classifications, 2001 Census area classifications were used. The variables used to create the area classifications are directly relevant to the factors of interest for social housing (e.g. age, nationality, employment status).
 - 3.13 The effect of amending the methodology to use 2011 ONS UK area classification rather than 2001 ONS UK area classification has been calculated, by measuring the impact on 2013/14 data. The separate effect on key demographic variables such as economic status, ethnicity and nationality has been measured, with changes typically being less than 0.5%. It did slightly change the proportion of general needs to supported housing lettings for local authorities – increasing the total number of social rent general needs lettings by 148 and therefore decreasing the number of social rent supported housing lettings by the same amount.
 - 3.14 For each of the 10 geographical clusters, the weight is calculated for all responding local authorities as the ratio of the number of lettings judged to be the most reliable (either reported to LAHS, reported to CORE or a projection if neither are available), relative to those reported to CORE.
 - 3.15 Neither imputation nor weighting are carried out for affordable rent lettings, mainly because it is still early in the Affordable Rent programme and so there are relatively few lettings. As the number grows the methodology may be extended to these lettings.

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- 3.16 Ahead of the 2013-14 National Statistics release, the department changed the data used to derive the cluster weights to a more comparable dataset to the LAHS dataset. Instead of using the lettings totals based on the 'location' of the dwelling being let, data based on the local authority 'owning' that dwelling was chosen, because the LAHS data is also based on the ownership and not the location of the dwellings. This led to lower weights and, in turn, to a smaller total number of dwellings at the national level than with the previous methodology. The weights for 2012/13 were also revised accordingly, with a new back series of 2012/13 dataset being calculated. The 2014/15 weighting methodology retains the use of the 'ownership' of the dwelling let, rather than 'location'.
- 3.17 Additionally, for 2014/15 weights only, the method of reporting lettings to LAHS has been amended. Previously (until 2013/14 inclusive) the method to deduce the number of lettings reported to LAHS that were comparable to the number of lettings that should have been reported to CORE was the following calculation:
- $$\begin{aligned} & \text{total number of dwellings let (question d10a)} \\ & \quad \text{minus} \\ & \quad \text{number of dwellings let through mutual exchanges (question d9a)} \\ & \quad \quad \text{minus} \\ & \quad \quad \text{number of dwellings let at Affordable Rent to new tenants to social} \\ & \quad \quad \quad \text{housing (question d8ab)} \end{aligned}$$
- 3.18 The questions asked by LAHS were improved for the 2014-15 collection year and the calculation for deducing the applicable number of lettings in LAHS is now:
- $$\begin{aligned} & \text{total number of dwellings let to both existing and new tenants to social} \\ & \quad \text{housing (question d4a plus question d8a)} \\ & \quad \quad \text{minus} \\ & \quad \text{total number of dwellings let at Affordable Rent to both existing and new} \\ & \quad \quad \text{tenants to social housing (question d4ac plus question d8ab)} \end{aligned}$$
- 3.19 Weights are only suitable for use when conducting analysis at the national level. When conducting analysis on sub-national geographies such as local authority areas the weights should not be used. The weights are derived for each individual cluster of local authorities to increase the representativeness at the national level of the records provided for that cluster, so they would distort the proportions of variables within the data if used at different spatial levels such as local authority areas.
- 3.20 For further information on the weighting and imputation methods, please see the report produced by ONS on '*Improving Outputs on Social Housing*

Lettings:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/245601/Improving_outputs_on_social_housing_lettings.pdf

- 3.21 The remainder of this section summarises the steps taken to quality assure the *Social Lettings* data and the main sources of bias and other errors that impact on the quality of the statistics. Being an administrative source, there is no sampling error in CORE-based statistics, as there is no sample. However, the *Social Lettings* are still estimates of the true values in the population, which are subject to other sources of error.
- 3.22 The main sources of error are coverage error, measurement error, processing error, non-response and errors in the assumptions made in the derivation of data. While it is not possible to measure all sources of error, quantitative estimates are produced where possible.

Coverage error

‘Coverage error arises from failure to cover adequately all members of the population being studied.’

To determine the impact of coverage error CORE counts are reconciled with other external data returns:

- Local authority CORE volumes are reconciled against the Local Authority Housing Statistics (LAHS) survey.
 - Private Registered Provider volumes are reconciled against the Statistical Data Return (from NROSH+ survey) outputs. From 2012-13 the SDR was altered to include lettings that are not recorded by CORE, but the data is still used to determine if trends on increasing or decreasing number of lettings match.
- 3.23 Any provider registered with the social housing regulator (Homes and Communities Agency from 2012, before then the Tenant Services Authority) is required to complete the CORE logs fully. Social landlords not registered but affiliated to the National Housing Federation are invited to complete the logs. Since 2004, local authorities started to submit data through CORE and as of the 2013/14 reporting period all local authorities are now participating in accordance with their regulatory (HCA) and Single

Data list (DCLG) obligations. It is estimated that 94% of local authority lettings were recorded in 2014/15. Table 4b in the National Statistics release gives more detail on the submission levels of stock holding local authorities.

Measurement error

‘Measurement error may arise due to inaccuracies in individual measurements of survey variables because of the inherent difficulties of observing, identifying and recording what has been observed.’

- 3.24 Measurement error may occur randomly, or may reflect a problem experienced by most data providers. The key mechanisms in place to minimise measurement error focus on the questionnaire form development process, re-education via programme materials; completion guides, manuals, newsletters, targeted communications, as well as interviewer and data provider training.
- 3.25 To ensure that the questions are understood, DCLG tests the new forms with data providers via workshops or consultations. New questions introduced to the survey are reviewed by DCLG after the first quarter of data collection. TNS suggests to data providers the use of organisations offering training to registered providers to help them improve their understanding of the questions and use of the data.
- 3.26 Data providers are requested to submit information as close as possible to the tenancy sign up, to allow for data to be fully validated and reported within the relevant quarter.

Processing error

‘Processing error includes errors in data capture, coding, editing and tabulation of the data as well as in the assignment of weights.’

- 3.27 Processing error can be systematic, for example, an error in the programming syntax that leads to a wrong code being consistently applied in a particular set of circumstances. Mechanisms in place to ensure accurate data capture and processing and to minimise processing error include:
- the department and TNS carry out systematic testing of the new questions
 - TNS test syntax for automated data checking processes

3.28 Processing error can also be random, for example keying errors in entering data which may cancel each other out. A number of validation checks built in to the TNS data collection programme, for example against:

- unlikely values
- unlikely combination of answers
- time series comparison

3.29 The number of errors and required alterations to raw data is monitored to ensure that quality standard is maintained, and reported as part of progress meetings. Errors can be defined in terms of errors within the source data that need to be re-qualified, or errors in manually keying in data in which case the data entered needs to be verified against the original source data. The CORE data submission system further defines two types of error:

Primary error – Missing Mandatory information

Secondary error – inconsistent or erroneous data

In both cases, log submissions cannot be reported as ‘valid’ data until all primary and secondary queries are resolved. Please note: The data reflected as part of the annual statistical release only includes valid records. The error rate for 2014-15 is as follows:

Query types	Proportion of errors raised compared to total errors that could be raised
Lettings - Primary Queries	0.45%
Lettings - Secondary Queries	0.31%
Sales - Primary Queries	0.46%
Sales - Secondary Queries	0.90%

3.30 TNS continuously monitors the performance of individual Registered Providers submitting data to CORE with varying performance indicators:

a) Volumes compared to both previous years’ volumes, or volumes submitted for other surveys, are reviewed weekly, monthly, and quarterly. The volumes are queried or confirmed via phone and email contact with individual providers. Emails contain counts to date and expected volumes.

b) Promptness of submissions – this is a measure between the date of the letting and when the information is entered into the CORE system. For 2014-15 the average was 44 days.

c) Promptness of query resolution – this is a measure between the date a query is raised and when it is resolved by data providers. For 2014-15 the average was 2 days.

For promptness of submissions and time taken to resolve queries, provider performance varies depending on organisation type, processes they use and size of organisation. For example, smaller providers tend to submit data less frequently than larger ones.

d) TNS are able to send providers summary reports for their organisation to allow for self-monitoring and identify areas of improvement.

TNS communicate to the Department specific concerns in relation to providers meeting their regulatory requirements, and if necessary, to the Homes and Communities Agency. For example, local authority performance, as detailed in table 4b of the statistical release, is monitored at a local authority level on a fortnightly basis in the last quarter of a data collection year.

Response rates

‘Non-response bias may occur if non-respondents differ from respondents. Non-response can lead to an increase in the variance of survey estimates, as non-response will reduce the sample size.’

- 3.31 The effect of non-response bias is minimised by steps applied in the weighting process. Response rates are continually monitored as part of the data collection process and contractor and the department try to maximise response rates from local authorities. An estimate of the quantity of missing data is reported in the statistical release in table 4b. The estimate is made by comparing the number of lettings reported by local authorities to CORE, to the number of lettings reported by local authorities to LAHS.
- 3.32 For item non-response, imputation is carried out when creating key derived variables. Addressing non-response through imputation can lead to the appearance of the variance within the estimates being reduced, as imputed values are usually less extreme than would be observed from sampling alone.

- 3.33 Imputation rates are now being monitored and reported on through the Quality Monitoring Reports as part of regular progress meetings with contractors. Table 4c of the statistical release shows the percentage of records where missing data have been imputed for each demographic variable.
- 3.34 Data collected on income of households has high levels of non-response, at around 50 per cent, and this is likely to be further complicated in the short term by the roll out of Universal Credit. However the Methodology Review did not recommend imputing missing values as the results would not be reliable and prone to misuse. The *Social Lettings* release quantifies the levels of non-response, how it imputes for missing values and the estimated impact on the final estimates.
- 3.35 In 2014/15 a few organisations were unable to provide information on particular variables. Where the variables are included in the summary tables, the proportion of missing data is indicated.

Assumption error in derived data

- 3.36 In October 2012, the Cabinet Secretary and the Head of the Civil Service commissioned a review of the quality assurance of analytical models that inform government policy. The review published a final report in March 2013, setting out results of work to map business critical models and quality assurance in government.⁷
- 3.37 The *Social Lettings* release includes some data that has been derived, using an underlying model that makes some assumptions. The model assumptions are reviewed annually by the Department's statisticians to ensure that the calculations for the derived datasets remain accurate and reflect the reality of what they are aiming to measure. For example, the calculations to derive housing benefit data are updated in line to changes to housing benefits by the Department for Work and Pensions.

Revisions

- 3.38 The policy for revisions of the Social Housing Lettings data has been developed in accordance with the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Official Statistics and the Department's Revisions Policy (found at

⁷https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/206946/review_of_qa_of_govt_analytical_models_final_report_040313.pdf

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statistical-notice-dclg-revisions-policy>).

- 3.39 Data are clearly indicated as being 'revised' (R) or 'provisional' (P) and subject to possible revision in further updates. Revisions of Social Housing Lettings data can be 'scheduled' or 'non-scheduled'.
- 3.40 Non-scheduled revisions are made when a substantial error has occurred as a result of the compilation, imputation or dissemination process. In this case the statistical release, live tables and other accompanying releases will be updated with a correction notice as soon as is practical.
- 3.41 Scheduled revisions are made when there has been a change in methodology, for example in the weighting approach.
- 3.42 The weights for 2013-14 data have been revised as part of the 2014/15 *Social Lettings* publication and therefore the national totals for the Social Housing datasets have also been revised. These are clearly marked with 'R' in the statistical release and accompanying live tables.

4. Timeliness and punctuality

*'Timeliness refers to the lapse of time between publication and the period to which the data refer. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates. Whether the outputs are up to date with respect to users' needs.'*⁸

- 4.1 There is a trade-off between timeliness and the other quality dimensions, in particular accuracy, accessibility and clarity. It is important to strike the right balance between ensuring that the data has been properly quality assured and explained, and releasing the data promptly.
- 4.2 Private registered providers and local authorities that have social housing stock are required to complete on-line questionnaires or upload datasets via CORE for each new social letting to a new or existing tenant, in a new or existing property. CORE allows for continuous updating but has quarterly submission cut-off points. Most private registered providers respond by the deadlines. There is a greater tendency for local authorities to submit social housing lettings data in bulk to meet the final financial year end cut off deadline in June. Some records for one private registered provider were submitted beyond the cut-off date for submission so the data was not included in the 2014/15 report.
- 4.3 To provide timely feedback to data providers, data has also been generally available on a quarterly basis through the year (during 2014/15 quarterly releases of data were stopped but will be re-instated when the new DCLG collection goes live). Quarter 4 data is not released until after the publication of the annual National Statistics *Social Lettings* release. It is important to note that the quarterly data is not imputed or weighted and they are not the 'official' social housing letting statistics.
- 4.4 The annual data is officially published after the end of the reference financial year. The publication date for the *Social Lettings* release is pre-announced on the DCLG website and the UK National Statistics Publication Hub <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html> .
- 4.5 TNS supplies the final data to DCLG, and statisticians in DCLG produce the *Social Lettings* reports and supporting documentation.

⁸<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/best-practice/gss-best-practice/gss-quality-good-practice/quality-measurement-and-reporting-guidance/index.html>

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- 4.6 In accordance with Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008, eligible members of staff are given pre-release access to the *Social Lettings* release 24 hours before publication. The pre-release access list is published on the statistics web page.
- 4.7 The *Social Lettings* data production and publication schedule are kept under review and will take into account user needs when considering the timeliness of future data releases.

5 Accessibility and clarity

‘Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the release details, illustrations and accompanying advice.’⁹

- 5.1 The *Social Lettings* release has been changing to incorporate new features to illustrate the data and to help visualise the key messages, and to provide context for the key messages. These features are described below. This section also describes how the data can be accessed.
- 5.2 DCLG offers a facility to obtain data in alternative formats (e.g. Braille, large print or audio). For this users need to quote the title and product code/ISBN of the publication, their address and telephone number and send to alternativeformats@communities.gis.gov.uk.

Social Housing Lettings release

- 5.3 *Social Lettings* provides key messages summarising the flow of social housing lettings in England. It is supported by maps and cartograms that help bring statistics to life. A larger group of maps is also made available in an accompanying pdf file.
- 5.4 The department makes the *Social Lettings* statistics available as structured data in accompanying tables. Some of these include time series that go back to 2007-08. The majority of data collected by CORE is also published split by local authority area location of the property being let, and also separately by the organisation that owns the property. Accompanying tables and maps available to download are accessed at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rents-lettings-and-tenancies>

CORE (TNS) website

- 5.5 Organisations participating in CORE can download quarterly datasets of their organisations’ own data from a password-protected section of the CORE (TNS) website. TNS are also able to provide a report summarising that information.

⁹<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/best-practice/gss-best-practice/gss-quality-good-practice/quality-measurement-and-reporting-guidance/index.html>

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- 5.6 The department recently reviewed the disclosure practices for CORE data, to bring them in line with GSS practice in regards to data protection. The new CORE website (when the collection is brought in-house) will publish quarterly and annual data in line with the new disclosure practices, including data which is currently unavailable from the TNS website. Detail of the new practices are available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rents-lettings-and-tenancies>
- 5.7 The Open Data White Paper '*Unleashing the Potential*' published by Cabinet Office in June 2012 announced that 'the Government intends to adopt the Five Star Scheme as a measure of the usability of its Open Data.'¹⁰
- 5.8 The *Social Lettings* data published on gov.uk is subject to rights detailed in the Open Government Licence v2.0, as specified on the department's statistics summary page: 'All content is available under the <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/2/> , except where otherwise stated'. The data is published in pdf format and Excel (Level 2 available on web with an open licence in proprietary machine-readable format).
- 5.9 The Linked Open Data Communities is a relatively new initiative to improve accessibility of datasets held by the department.¹¹ Some variables from the *Social Lettings* datasets are included for the first time, including revised 2013/14 data as well as 2014/15 data. The data will be available from <http://opendatacommunities.org/data/housing-market> and selecting 'CORE - Social Housing Lettings'. The Open Data Communities is Level 5, providing linked data in multiple machine-readable formats including JSON, RDF, Turtle and N-triples, and a SPARQL 1.1 endpoint.

Social Housing Lettings data security strategy

- 5.10 The underlying CORE data that feeds into *Social Lettings* records information anonymously and absolute confidentiality on residents' circumstances is maintained. As the data is at record level and potentially at risk of disclosure, appropriate steps are taken to protect the data.
- 5.11 Tenants participating in interviews are informed of how their confidentiality is protected. The CORE manual, for use by housing officers tasked with collecting information for CORE, states that "During the interview the tenant should be informed of the uses of the data, that any answers given

¹⁰https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/78946/CM8353_acc.pdf

¹¹<http://opendatacommunities.org/>

will be treated confidentially and that the information is passed on anonymously (no names or address)” in regards to protected characteristics, and “When asking the tenant for this information it is advisable to explain that the details are needed for general analysis, and that their specific income figures will remain confidential” in regards to income related data collected.

- 5.12 The TNS CORE system is security protected, in line with industry standards and holds ISO27001 certification. The new DCLG in-house system has also been security accredited in line with Government standards.
- 5.13 Micro data (i.e. record level information) is deposited with the UK Data Archive. The UK Data Archive follows strict security protocols to store and access the datasets. Users can access the data through the UK Data service, which allows users to access record level data via different layers of protection to meet different user needs. Micro-data is only released via licence. Three licences are available and each has different disclosure controls, access and use restrictions. The End User Licence is for access to datasets that are not private information as defined by the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Special Licence and Secure Access are for access to micro-data with ‘private’ information as defined by the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. For further detail on CORE disclosure practices, please see details available from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rents-lettings-and-tenancies>

For further information on licencing and the process for accessing CORE record level data, see the UK Data Service website:

<http://ukdataservice.ac.uk/get-data/how-to-access>

And a brief guide produced by DCLG available from:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rents-lettings-and-tenancies>

6.Coherence and comparability

*'The degree to which data can be compared over time and domain (for example geographic level). The degree to which data that refer to the same topic but are derived from different sources or methods, are similar.'*¹²

Comparability with other social housing data sources

- 6.1 There are three main sources for information relating to social lettings at local authority level: the CORE administrative system and *Local Authorities Housing Statistics* (LAHS), managed by the department; and the annual *Statistical Data Return* (SDR) of Private Registered Providers, managed by the HCA. The *English Housing Survey* also provides social housing lettings data, but the sample size of the survey leads to results which are not accurate enough at the local authority level.
- 6.2 The data collected through CORE differs from the social housing data in LAHS in that CORE is a 'flow' measure which records data at record level, whereas data in LAHS is a 'stock' measure of all social housing stock in local authorities. CORE data focuses on the tenancy details at the point of letting, and besides property characteristics also collects information on the socio-demographic profile of the household, their housing circumstances and some financial information. As a result of changing the weighting methodology, the *Social Housing Lettings* are now more consistent with the stock-based *Local Authority Housing Statistics*.
- 6.3 The SDR annual return is only completed by private registered providers and information collected includes data on size and type of home, location and rents over the year. For providers with 1,000 homes or more, it also collects data on lettings through the year. The focus is however on the property itself and does not collect information on the socio-demographic characteristics or housing circumstances of the household.
- 6.4 The *Social Housing Lettings* release covers only CORE data on 'lettings'. The CORE data on 'sales' is published in the annual Social Housing Sales (*Social Sales*) release, covering sales of both local authorities and private registered providers.

¹²<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/best-practice/gss-best-practice/gss-quality-good-practice/quality-measurement-and-reporting-guidance/index.html>

Comparability through time

- 6.5 Within the CORE logs, each question has a unique code and if a new response option is introduced following a log review, the next available code is used. When questions or options are deleted, the codes are not re-used. This maximises comparison through time of the datasets released and avoids confusion to users.
- 6.6 Care must be taken when interpreting trends in social lettings by type of provider, as the participation of local authorities in the CORE system has increased consistently through time. Although weights have been changed to take this into account, the quality of the data can vary from year to year.
- 6.7 The questions in the CORE log may be amended each year so users that require data for previous years need to ensure that they have the log for the correct year. These can be found on the CORE (TNS) website.
- 6.8 Please also reference the CORE data dictionaries which can be found from the following page: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rents-lettings-and-tenancies>
- 6.9 Data for social housing lettings is publicly available, by tenure, from 2004 for social rent and from 2012 for affordable rent via the UK Data Archive¹³.

Devolved administration data sources

- 6.10 Social housing lettings statistics for the devolved administrations of the UK are published separately by them. They are not directly comparable figures due to differences in data collection methodologies and the underlying social housing policies that affect some of the derived variables. Scotland runs a similar system to CORE, but this covers private registered provider lettings only.
- 6.11 Related statistics from the Devolved Administration can be found at:

Wales

- Social housing stock and rent statistics:
<http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/social-housing-stock-rents/?lang=en>
- Social housing lettings statistics:
<http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/social-housing-lettings-data-collection/?lang=en>

¹³ <http://ukdataservice.ac.uk/get-data/how-to-access>

Scotland

- Local authority social lettings:
<http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/HSfS/Lettings>
- Social sector summary tables:
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/HSfS/socialhousing>
- Private registered provider social lettings:
<http://www.scottishhousingregulator.gov.uk/publications/performance-tables-%E2%80%93-lettings-and-void-loss>

Northern Ireland

- Social housing statistics including data on tenancies, household, allocations and sales can be found at:
<http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/media-centre/news-departments/news-dsd/news-dsd-october-2014/news-dsd-231014-ni-housing-statistics.htm>

Sources for further information or advice

- Link to explanation of open data standards
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-data-white-paper-unleashing-the-potential>
- Guidelines for Measuring Statistical Quality of official statistics, published by the ONS, available at
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/quality/guidelines-for-measuring-statistical-quality/index.html>
- UK National Statistics Publication Hub
www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html
- Code of Practice for Official Statistics
www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/the-national-statistics-standard/code-of-practice/index.html
- Disclosure practices for releasing CORE data
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/rents-lettings-and-tenancies>