Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Statutory homelessness: Technical note

Last updated: 11 September 2019

Experimental statistics and H-CLIC

From 1st April 2018 the **Homelessness Case Level Information Collection (H-CLIC)** data system replaced the aggregated data return (collected using the **P1E form**) for all new homeless applications. The replacement of the aggregated return coincided with the introduction of new legislation, the 2017 HRA. This new system collects more detailed data than previously on households, the activities offered to assist them, and their outcomes. The H-CLIC data specification, with detailed guidance for each field and guidance on how to enter the data through MHCLG's DELTA system, are all available on a dedicated Homelessness Statistics User Forum webpage https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/user-facing-pages/mhclg-homelessness-statistics-user-forum/. MHCLG have also published a series of newsletters about progress on the H-CLIC project which are also available on the webpage.

In this release missing values have been treated differently. Usually these would be imputed to ensure national headline figures are representative. Where there is no data for previous quarters to compare under the new prevention and relief duties, imputation has not been possible. Authorities who have failed to submit any H-CLIC data for the new Act since April 2018 have been excluded from the totals. This means the national total is likely to be an underestimate. For households in temporary accommodation missing values were reduced by allowing local authorities to complete a P1E and / or H-CLIC return during 2018-19. This is explained in more detail in the data quality section.

The format and content of the release will change as the quality of data in the new fields improves. We are grateful for the effort of all local authorities to provide data and resolve any quality issues. Quarterly data will continue to be collected and reported in regular releases. Revisions to previous quarters will be published as required to reflect improvements in data quality and completeness.

Data collection and methods

Local housing authorities report their activities under Part 7 of the Housing Act 1996 to the MHCLG by completing the quarterly HCLIC statistical return. H-CLIC is an upload of all cases about statutory homelessness and the authority's activities within the legislative framework. Data in the temporary accommodation and main duty sections is also supplemented by additional data provided through P1E, where accurate data through H-CLIC was not available.

1. Rates per 1,000 households have been calculated using the 2014-based household projections for 2017 produced by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. These were published on 12 July 2016 and are available at Table 406 at the following link:
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-household-projections

2. National and regional figures in the text and accompanying tables are presented rounded to the nearest 10 households or applicants. Local authority figures provided in the accompanying Live Tables are unrounded. Local authority to regional and regional to national sum totals may not match due to rounding.

3. In tables containing information that is considered sensitive breakdowns have been suppressed at local authority, regional or national level to protect the identity of individuals. Suppressed data is clearly marked in the live tables and may mean local authority data provides a lower figure than the regional or national rounded totals.

4. Data in this release is part of a new data collection and reflects new duties owed under the 2017 amended HRA. This means that most missing returns at local authority level have not been imputed. This means England totals are likely to be an underestimate. If missing figures are subsequently provided, figures will be revised in the following release.

5. Missing or incomplete local authority data has been imputed and included in national and regional totals. Imputation replaces missing data with an estimated value based on additional information; where local authorities have failed to provide an accurate total, imputation is based on the quarter-on-quarter change observed in groups of local authorities. The groups aim to provide the best estimate for trends by comparing local authorities with similar characteristics, whilst keeping the groups large enough to not be influenced by large unusual changes reported by one authority within a group.
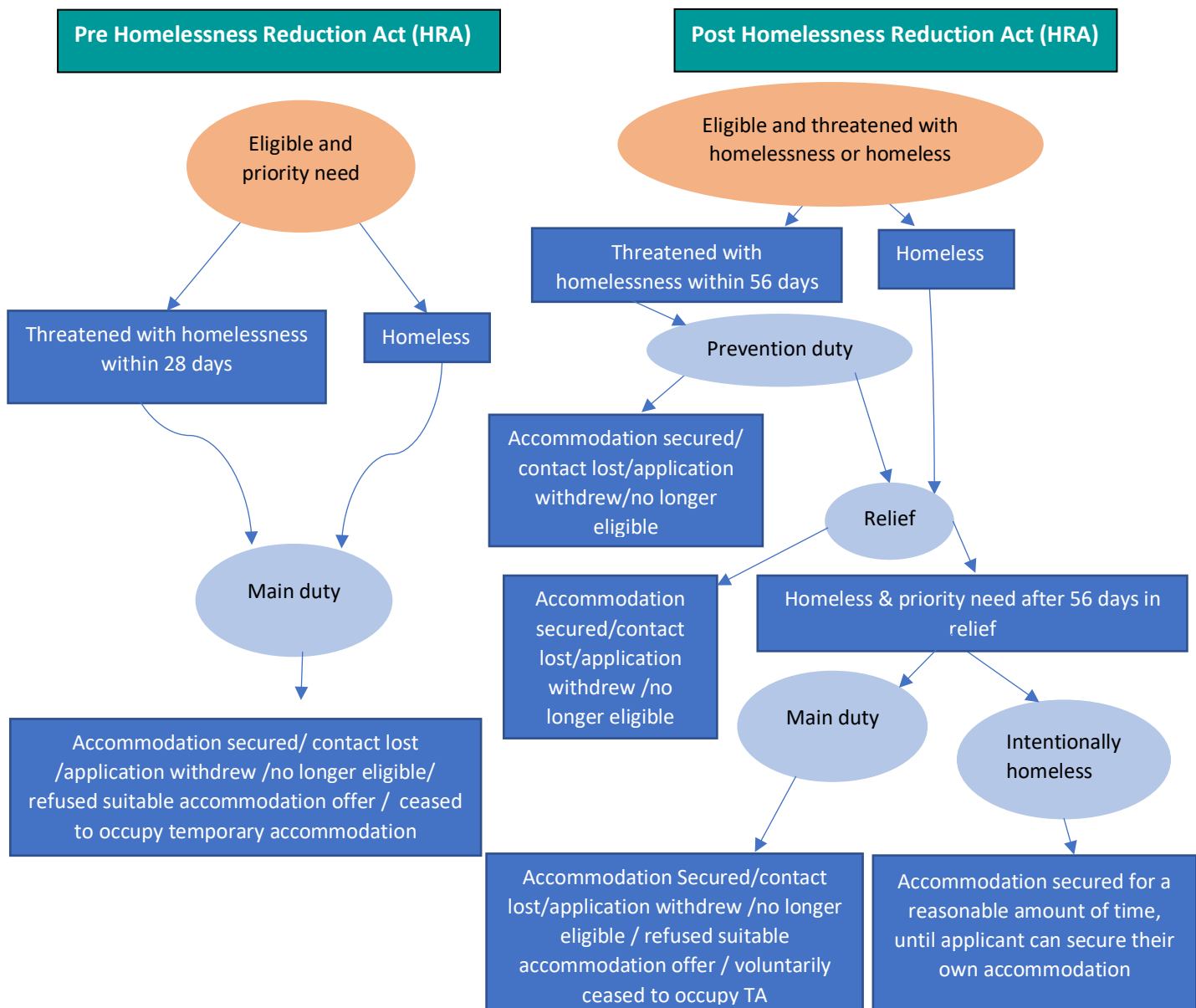
The three groups we use to impute are London Boroughs, Unitaries combined with Metropolitan districts and finally shire districts. Where local authorities have provided a missing or incomplete breakdown, local authorities' previously submitted data is used to estimate the values using a multiplier based on previous proportional representation within a group.

Figures for initial assessments, prevention and relief duty outcomes cannot be imputed for 5 local authorities that have failed to provide any data via H-CLIC since its inception. The impact of missing data in these sections is estimated to be relatively minor (less than a 5% underestimate in initial decisions on duties owed).

Comparability between the new H-CLIC case level collection and the old P1E summary return

Some data collected via P1E is **broadly comparable** to data collected via H-CLIC. The new method of reporting means initially any suggestion of recent trends about households in temporary accommodation should be made with caution.

Prevention and relief information collected by H-CLIC cover new legal duties introduced from the 3rd April 2018 so these are **not comparable** to the activity information collected in P1E.

Pre Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA)

Eligible and priority need

- Threatened with homelessness within 28 days
- Homeless

Main duty

Accommodation secured/ contact lost /application withdrew /no longer eligible/ refused suitable accommodation offer / ceased to occupy temporary accommodation

Post Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA)

Eligible and threatened with homelessness or homeless

- Threatened with homelessness within 56 days
- Homeless

Prevention duty

Accommodation secured/ contact lost/application withdrew/no longer eligible

Accommodation secured/contact lost/application withdrew /no longer eligible

Relief

Homeless & priority need after 56 days in relief

Main duty

Accommodation Secured/contact lost/application withdrew /no longer eligible / refused suitable accommodation offer / voluntarily ceased to occupy TA

Intentionally homeless

Accommodation secured for a reasonable amount of time, until applicant can secure their own accommodation

The definition of main duty acceptances remains the same but the introduction of the new prevention and relief duties mean there are now steps local authorities take with households before they reach a main duty. These steps last a minimum of 56 days and make it difficult to assess trends in new main duties owed during April to June 2018. Any inferences about trends in main duty acceptances during 2018/19 should be made with caution.

H-CLIC is a household case level data collection and contains **new information not collected in the P1E return**. H-CLIC includes some information on all individuals within the household and not just the main applicant. As H-CLIC is new and still being quality assured this release contains a limited amount of data in order to publish key information activities carried out by local authorities under the new legislation. This release includes numbers of initial assessments, prevention and relief activities, main homelessness acceptances, and the number of households in temporary accommodation. In future MHCLG intend to expand the publication to include more breakdowns on the circumstances and needs of households, reasons for homelessness. Timescales will be determined by the quality of the information received by the Department.

More information and guidance about the H-CLIC data collection can be found:

https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/guidances/mhclg-homelessness-statistics-user-forum/

Data quality and coverage

All HCLIC returns submitted by local housing authorities undergo thorough validation and cross-checking and late returns are chased to ensure overall response is as complete and accurate as possible. Local authorities are given a minimum of six weeks to submit accurate data and reminded when they fail to submit. Any missing returns after this period are omitted or imputed in the release. These are referenced in the main release and associated live tables.

The diagram below shows the data collection and submission process, QA checks and feedback between local authorities and MHCLG during the process.

For initial assessments, prevention and relief outcomes and wider information related to these cases.
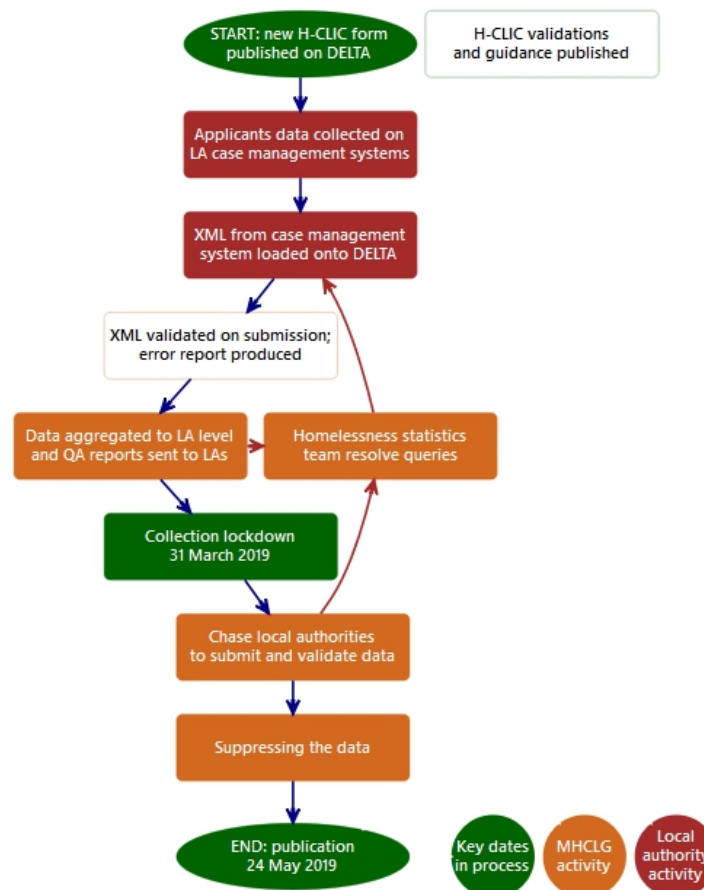

Case data is reported by local authorities onto the DELTA data collection platform. On upload a case level error report is instantly available to authorities by case ID. This allows local authorities to fix any case issues in their own systems. Once the deadline has passed or when the local authority is happy their case return is complete a summary level data QA report is sent to the local authority. This report contains the metrics we plan to publish in the release including any data from previous quarters. Any inconsistencies with previous quarters or anomalous use of certain fields are flagged in these reports and sent back to local authorities for approval. Local authorities fix their data and / or report and system issues to their software suppliers. A new case level submission is then provided on DELTA and a new updated summary return is provided to the local authority. The overall process is summarised below:

After the local authority returns phase is complete MHCLG collate the information and the producer QA verification process begins.

Any issues raised by local authorities are logged throughout the process. Where system based issues are identified these are then raised with the software supplier.

Conversations with suppliers then lead to improvements in guidance, a correction to MHCLG's own or the software suppliers systems or a combination of all of these to resolve the issue.

For temporary accommodation, main duties owed and main duty outcomes data
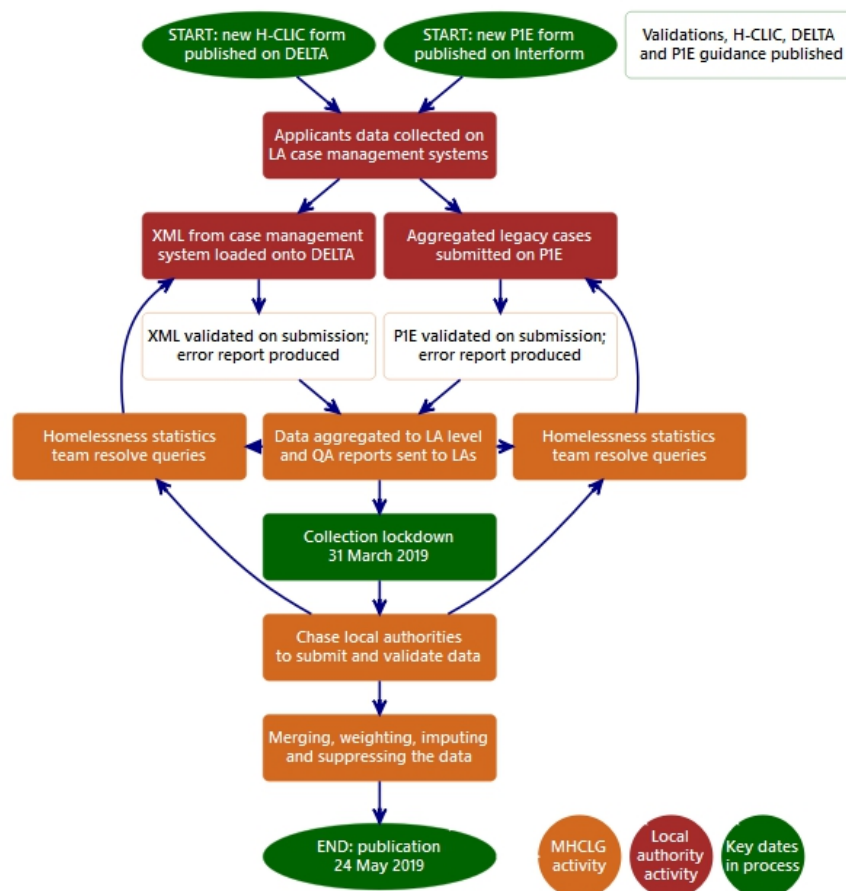
The process for temporary accommodation and main duties is similar to that for initial assessments, prevention and relief. However, for temporary accommodation and main duties local authorities can opt to provide data through P1E as well as H-CLIC. Local authorities provided this information using P1E, H-CLIC or both. This flexibility was provided to local authorities to ensure the best data quality was achieved during the transition. Additional steps were undertaken for these authorities to ensure no duplication or omission of data occurred.

QA principles, standards and checks applied by data suppliers
Software suppliers started to incorporate the H-CLIC reporting requirement into their case management systems from August 2018 to April 2019. Software suppliers and local authorities were invited to test their XML extracts during May to June 2018. H-

CLIC is an XML data submission, uploaded to MHCLG's DELTA[1] data collection system. The DELTA system checks the format of H-CLIC files, and the fields in each case are checked using schema validation tool. The schema checks are XPath coded scripts that test the validity of the data structure. Once the data has been uploaded onto DELTA the values submitted in each case are checked for consistency. Any omitted fields or inconsistent reporting variables are validated using a validation report that is shared immediately with the authority on the DELTA website. Local authorities reporting this data are required to check and correct the inconsistencies.

Local authorities have been in a continuous dialogue with MHCLG during the first three quarter reporting periods to ensure validations are working correctly and are understood. A number of issues were corrected during the first quarter and further work has been undertaken by MHCLG to improve this process in future quarters.

Producer's QA investigations and documentation
Case level validations in DELTA are explained with information flags marked against the reportable fields and text validation messages that help local authorities identify the cause of their mistake. Where a combination of errors are flagged MHCLG have produced a validations glossary that helped local authorities understand and correct these errors.

Many software suppliers have incorporated MHCLG's schematron, a validation script run against the xml file, into local authority systems to enable local authorities to identify and fix errors at the point of collection. This allows the administrative officers who collect the information to resolve any issues at source.

After local authorities completed their first H-CLIC submission on DELTA, MHCLG sent out a number of quality assurance reports. Where relevant these reports combined pre 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act case updates submitted via the aggregated P1E return with new Act data submitted on H-CLIC. The reports checked for any significant changes against similar fields collected via the P1E and highlighted any possible issues. These quality assurance reports aggregated activity totals for the homelessness duties owed, outcomes, temporary accommodation and a number of other breakdowns. Local authorities were required to check these against their internal reports and on the ground knowledge to sign off their data submission.

For new prevention and relief duties under the 2017 Homelessness Reduction Act and existing main duties, local authorities were noted of changes in caseload volume that appeared inconsistent with the rest of England. These included large percentage or absolute increases or decreases in caseload volume compared with similar local

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[1] https://delta.communities.gov.uk/login

authorities in previous quarters. Any significant changes or data artefacts were flagged to authorities with an expectation that these issues would be explained or case data revised to correct for known mistakes.

Some examples of data issues highlighted in the report include:
- Duplicates – if some legacy cases were submitted via P1E for October to December 2018 and also some legacy cases were submitted via HCLIC this was flagged as a potential duplicate. The local authority was then contacted to confirm if the submissions were duplicates or separate cases.
- Comparing the January to March 2018 temporary accommodation figures with the June, September and December 2018 figures.
- Checks for missing sections or fields when no relief activity or prevention activity was reported at the local authority level or where the people and temporary accommodation sections contained few or no items

During the quality assurance process a number of authorities raised concerns with their submission. MHCLG's homelessness statistics team worked with these authorities and their software suppliers to resolve any incorrectly formatted data, data omissions or misunderstanding of the data requirement. Lessons were learned throughout the process and guidance documentation, new documentation, test sites were all made available to continually improve the quality of all local authority submissions.

The quality assurance process and additional three months spent improving data quality for the first quarter has significantly improved the data in this release. However, in order to ensure data is of a publishable standard the data available in this publication is reduced versus data published before the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act.

Ongoing quality improvements

The quality of data in this publication are continually being improved. This publication is currently labelled as experimental to reflect the new methods being used to aggregate case level information to provide summary outputs. New methods are also being development to impute for missing data, where a local authority has not provided data for certain sections of the form or when the data provided is not consistent. The purpose of publishing these statistics as experimental is to allow users to review the statistics with an understanding of the statistics' quality and limitations and make qualified use of them before they are fully developed.

Current plans to further improve the publication and future processes of this collection include:

- Working to agree standard rules/principles around quarter on quarter revisions and imputations
- Development of standard imputation processes for missing/invalid data
- Automating processes to reduce human error and speed up processes
- Monitoring and evaluation of key indicators which can be used to assess when a 'steady state' has been reached. This can be done by monitoring fluctuations in the dataset.
- Working with users and data suppliers to better understand issues and improve data submission processes, and quality issues for data providers
- Understanding user views through an online consultation (available here https://www.research.net/r/MHCLG_Homelessness_Statistics_Consultation_Survey and User workshops in Spring 2020 to provide updates on progress, discuss the presentation and publication of the statistics and better understand user requirements.

MHCLG anticipate that these changes to quality will take some time to complete and updates will be provided with each quarterly.

Data limitations

Detailed information on the data coverage and limitation per H-CLIC section can be found on the front page of each of the live tables.

Initial assessments

Initial assessments include information on the new prevention and relief duties as assessed at the point of application. Applicants who were assessed as being owed a prevention duty at their initial assessment and were subsequently owed a relief duty are only reported as owed a prevention duty during this release.

Assessment data is not comparable with the homelessness decisions figures reported in previous statistical releases. This is because amendments to legislation, as introduced by the 2017 HRA, have introduced new duties that mean more people will be eligible for assistance out of homelessness from local authorities.

As local authorities adjust to the new system of collecting data, figures may be misreported. For example, during April to June 25 local authorities reported a large proportion of the 'not threatened with homelessness' cases, incorrectly logging 'advice only' cases that were never formally issued a not homeless decision under this

category. These authorities have been working to correct these mistakes in future quarters. During April to June local authorities reported some cases where household was not eligible, yet owed a prevention or relief duty. This was a failure to update the eligibility information. For this reason eligibility is currently not provided in this release. Where ineligible was noted and duties were reported to have been carried out these activities are included in the statistics. The number of local authorities and extent to which their data is affected has improved since June 2018. We are continuing to work with local authorities and software suppliers to resolve these issues.

Prevention and relief

Prevention and relief data in this release cannot be compared with the prevention and relief activity reported in previous statistical releases based on the P1E returns and provided under the pre HRA 1996 Act. Through the P1E local authorities were able to report all cases where homelessness was prevented, whether or not a homelessness application had been taken. Data submissions included, for example, households who had been provided with assistance through a third party organisation funded by the Council to provide services that helped to prevent homelessness, such as money advice services. Prevention data reported in this release are based on case level information on homelessness applications and does not include 'upstream' prevention activity that resulted in no homelessness application being necessary.

Feedback from local authorities who did provide data suggests that prevention and relief activities may have been underreported in April to June 2018, caused by issues with their new software extracting and uploading such data. Many local authorities and software suppliers were able to correct these issues in the subsequent July to September 2018, October to December 2018 and January to March 2019 publication but others remain. For example Southwark have resolved an issue with overreporting prevention outcomes, however, figures for April to June 2018 remain inflated compared to subsequent quarters. Durham have overreported some cases across 2018/19 where some cases have been reported more than once. They have been working to resolve these issues and their data has improved in January to March.

As local authorities get to grips with the new Act, MHCLG's HAST team have been using the H-CLIC data to identify how local authorities are adopting the new legislation. Where certain categories are higher than expected – refusal to cooperate and prevention duty ends after 56 days and no further action are being applied correctly. Further improvements to figures are expected in future quarters

Main duty decisions

Main duty decisions were reported through a combination of the P1E and H-CLIC from April to June 2018 to October to December 2018. In January to March the old P1E

collection system was discontinued and a slimmer version of the form was migrated onto the DELTA data collection platform. This included only main duty outcomes and temporary accommodation sections. Users of particular software systems have suggested that their data is not being exported and this was still a problem in January to March 2019. In January to March more local authorities struggled to provide accurate data for main duties ended through H-CLIC. England totals included imputed data for 17 local authorities because of missing or inaccurate / incomplete data. Data for a further four local authorities were missing and could not be imputed. These are highlighted in the live tables

Main duties ended

Main duty end reasons were reported through a combination of the P1E and H-CLIC. As with prevention and relief sections, comments from local authorities suggest that figures in this section may be underreported. However, users of particular software systems have suggested that their data is not being exported and this was still a problem in January to March 2019. In January to March more local authorities struggled to provide accurate data for main duties ended through H-CLIC. England totals included imputed data for 11 local authorities because of missing or inaccurate / incomplete data. Data for a further four local authorities were missing and could not be imputed. These are highlighted in the live tables

Temporary accommodation

England and regional totals include imputations for missing values in April-June for 29 local authorities who provided no temporary accommodation figures or their figures were incomplete and could not be used. This was also the case for 21 local authorities in July to September, 40 in October to December, and 22 in January to March. The imputed local authority data for each of the four quarters represented 9.4%, 7.8%, 19.8% and 12.6% of households in TA at the end of March 2018 before H-CLIC was introduced. Further data was imputed where local authorities did not provide TA type or household type breakdowns, which is detailed in the respective tables.

As part of the initial consultation to move from a P1E summary return to H-CLIC case level submissions local authorities identified a potential issue linking their homeless cases to the associated temporary accommodation placements. To assist local authorities, a transition period was offered where local authorities could separately report temporary accommodation data through the old P1E return as an alternative or addition to H-CLIC. It was up to local authorities to choose the most suitable option. Those local authorities who procured a new software system typically reported via both returns. Whilst those who updated existing software tended to return P1E or H-CLIC.

Double counting of temporary accommodation placements was a risk when collecting information via both P1E and H-CLIC. Where double reporting was suspected local authorities were approached to explain their mechanism for reporting these cases so that the duplicates could be omitted from either the P1E or H-CLIC return. However, the likelihood of this occurring was low because temporary accommodation placement data is usually linked to a payments database and records are kept up to date by the local authority to ensure any payments to accommodation providers are stopped when placements end. Any local authority that submitted data across two systems were checked for the placement dates in H-CLIC and overall totals versus the previous quarter, when only P1E was reported.

Where submissions were via H-CLIC only and more than 30% and +/-30 out from the previous quarter data, local authorities were approached for an explanation. If no explanation of the change could be provided this data was rejected and imputed figures were used instead for the England total. These local authorities can be identified in the live tables because they are highlighted yellow and their imputed figures are not published – to ensure these are not misused.

During the transition from P1E to H-CLIC as part of the QA process local authorities were asked to verify their households in temporary accommodation. There were a number of inconsistencies identified in the way local authorities reported these. Some local authorities omitted anyone in temporary accommodation whose main duty had been discharged and other local authorities did not. 66% of temporary accommodation is still being reported through P1E and the method varies by local authority. As a result, caution should be taken when using and interpreting the temporary accommodation data, especially when comparing data to previous quarters based on the P1E returns. In terms of comparisons related to recent changes in legislation, it should also be noted that the temporary accommodation figures remain the most consistent with historical data.

A number of local authorities have identified previous reporting errors by temporary accommodation type. This can affect the trends in certain categories. The most recent amendment was made by Coventry to their 31st March 2019 and 30th June 2018 return. This moved 319 households from nightly paid self-contained accommodation to nightly paid shared facilities, which are reported as bed and breakfast accommodation. Coventry's use of nightly paid shared facilities fell from 319 to 235 during 2018/19. As their data has been adjusted from June 2018 onwards, this represents 235 out of the 910 households in temporary accommodation increase from March 2018 to March 2019, and is used to derive Coventry's imputed estimates in September and December 2018.

Revisions policy

Scheduled revisions

There are no scheduled revisions to the statutory homelessness release. However, it should be noted that data in each new release and latest quarter is provisional and subject to revision in future quarters. Local authorities may add new cases late or revise previous data submissions where mistakes have been spotted. These changes will not be marked with an R because these are likely to be extensive across local authorities.

Where revisions to earlier quarters are made, these will be incorporated into the dataset at the end of the financial year.

Non Scheduled Revisions

Where local authorities spot a mistake in their own data that change affects the national story, such as changing a national trend or total by 3% or more or reversing it, these changes will be incorporated into the live tables and published statistics release as soon as is possible. These changes will not be pre announced on the release calendar. Users will be informed of the change by a change to the title of the document, adding a '(revised)' suffix both on the webpage and in the document itself. An explanation of the changes will be included in the updated publication and local authority level changes will be marked with an 'R'. Smaller changes at the local authority level are routinely expected as part of the previous quarter revisions in future publications. These changes are expected due to the provisional nature of the first release. Where a local authority notes a minor correction to their data, these will be updated in the next release along with the other routine amendments.

If MHCLG spot a mistake in the numbers or trends referred to in this release or live tables these will be updated as soon as possible. Users will be informed of the change by a change to the title of the document, adding a '(revised)' suffix both on the webpage and in the document itself. An explanation of the changes will be included in the updated publication and local authority level changes will be marked with an 'R'.