



## CIH Scotland response to the homelessness data review

**Submitted 10 December 2020**

This is a response to the consultation by the Scottish Government seeking views on how homelessness data is used and how data collection and publications could be improved.

### Consultation questions

#### Q1. Which publications and elements (if any) do you use?

	Text	Tables	Charts
Biannual update	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Annual publication	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Equalities breakdowns	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Housing Options	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

#### Q 2. If you use homelessness data from any other source(s), please provide details

CIH uses homelessness data from across the UK when compiling the annual UK Housing review. In Scotland, our main focus is on comparing local authority and national trends in homelessness data.

#### Q3. Statistics related to which geographical level are you most interested in?

- Local authority
- National
- UK-wide
- Other (please specify)

#### Q 4. Do you use homelessness data for any of the following:

- Service management
- Service planning
- Service improvement
- Policy development and evaluation
- Funding allocations
- Reporting at Scotland level



- X Reporting at local authority level
- Benchmarking / reporting against targets or key indicators
- X Research / analysis;
- X General awareness of issues / trends
- Other, please specify

CIH works across the UK to inform policy and legislation and support housing professionals and organisations to improve performance.

We monitor homelessness data and use statistics to inform our work including responses to consultations, briefings, media work and high profile publications such as the annual UK Housing Review.

**Q 5. Please provide specific details of any content which needs adapted or updated**

Monitoring suspension of local connection referrals

The Scottish Government has confirmed that it intends to suspend local connection referrals in all local authority areas across Scotland. It has also said that the impact of these changes will be monitored so that any adverse impact on local authority homelessness services can be identified and addressed.

The consultation proposed monitoring the number of households presenting from another area through HL1 data collection. This will need to be reviewed to ensure that information about households' previous address is recorded.

Domestic abuse

The methodology for collecting data on homelessness has not been updated since the legal definition of domestic abuse was expanded to include coercive control (2018). Currently, homelessness staff select from the following options:

- Dispute within household: violent or abusive
- Dispute within household/relationship breakdown: non-violent
- Fleeing non-domestic violence
- Harassment
- Overcrowding
- Asked to leave
- Other reason for leaving accommodation/household

A housing officer might interpret coercive control as 'dispute within household: violent or abusive' or 'non-violent relationship breakdown' or 'harassment' or 'other reason for leaving accommodation'. This means that the resulting data is unclear.



The Scottish Government review of homelessness data collection should:

- Reflect the definition of domestic abuse as coercive control.
- Ensure that data collection and analysis take account of the differential aspects of women's homelessness as part of a wider equalities-competent strategy to gather and analyse data.
- There are significant gaps in homelessness data, including under-estimates of the number of people sofa surfing, living with friends and family, and/or in precarious and unsafe circumstances. This undermines policy and action to prevent women's homelessness. The Scottish Government should review data collection methods and analysis to fill these gaps in hidden homelessness.
- Consider describing domestic abuse as 'coercive control' and not 'dispute within a household' to properly reflect the causes of women's homelessness.

#### Other considerations

In addition, and resources permitting, the following would be useful:

- Table 1 expanded to include broad age groups such as 16-24; 35-49, 50-64 and 65+.
- Some additional tables of characteristics of applicants to make it possible to assess if there are any systematic differences between applicant households and those assessed as homeless.
- Better alignment of household composition with that used in the Scottish Household Survey and the Scottish Government survey harmonisation categories.

#### **Q 6. Please provide details of any content which is not needed / used**

No comment.

#### **Q 7. Are there any data gaps / items which you would like to see information gathered on?**

We acknowledge that the Scottish Government has committed to developing a more robust system for collecting data on rough sleeping. However, it is worth noting here that this has not been delivered yet.

#### **Q 8. How important to you is it that the Scottish Homelessness data collections:**

a) Reflect the Scottish policy landscape?

- 1 = not at all
- 
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- 
- 5 = very

**b) Reflect local level trends and service provision?**

- 1 = not at all
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- 
- 
- 5 = very

**c) Provide comparability between local authorities within Scotland?**

- 1 = not at all
- 
- 
- 
- 5 = very

**d) Provide comparability between Scotland and other parts of the UK?**

- 1 = not at all
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- 
- 
- 5 = very

**Q 9. Please provide more details / comments / preferences around the balance between meeting local reporting needs vs Scotland-wide comparability**

Both are essential in assessing local needs and the implementation/monitoring of national policies and legislative changes.

**Q 10. Please provide more details / comments / preferences around the balance between meeting Scotland-specific needs vs UK comparability**

Our first priority would be to ensure Scotland-specific reporting needs are met. However, greater comparability of data across the UK would be useful in assessing the success of different approaches and informing evidence based policy development.

**Q 11. Please provide suggestions for improving UK comparability**

The Office for National Statistics is carrying out a review of comparability of homelessness statistics across the UK and the recommendations should be taken into account (<https://bit.ly/3gy3y9t>).





As part of this review or any work being undertaken by the Scottish Government, the following should be considered:

- The number of households that approach their LA/NIHE to assist them prevent or respond to homelessness. At present, the only reasonably comparable 'headline figure' is in respect of "homeless acceptances". The absence of a count of homeless applications or presentations can give a false impression about the relative scale of the problem in each of the four nations.
- The socio-economic characteristics of homeless applicants (or accepted applicants) using standardised or consistent categories for household composition, age groups, ethnic grouping and other protected characteristics.
- Greater consistency across all four nations in terms of the recording of the length of time spent in temporary accommodation.
- Housing outcomes of all applicants (already undertaken in Scotland but not all of the other nations).
- Support needs of applicants, where practical using a consistent classification (possibly including an overarching classification that more detailed country specific figures can be merged into).

While the Scottish Government is developing its new approach to rough sleeping data collection, it should consider opportunities to work with the other nations across the UK to produce data which is more easily comparable. However, we acknowledge that this is a complex and challenging issue and we would not want the Scottish Government to compromise its approach for the sake of comparability.

**Q 12. Please provide any other feedback and comments relating to homelessness statistics**

No further comments.

### **About CIH**

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is the independent voice for housing and the home of professional standards. Our goal is simple - to provide housing professionals and their organisations with the advice, support, and knowledge they need to be brilliant. CIH is a registered charity and not-for-profit organisation. This means that the money we make is put back into the organisation and funds the activities we carry out to support the housing sector. We have a diverse membership of people who work in both the public and private sectors, in 20 countries on five continents across the world. Further information is available at: [www.cih.org](http://www.cih.org).

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