

Cross Government Housing, Homelessness and Planning Statistics User engagement statement 2020

Introduction

Statistics on housing and planning are an essential public asset. Good statistics and evidence are fundamental to the judgements and decisions made by policy makers, the housing sector and private citizens across the UK.

Housing policy is devolved across the four nations of the UK and statisticians from across government are working together to improve the coherence of housing and planning statistics. This user engagement statement sets out how we will engage with users and how you can respond to the service we provide.

This user engagement statement has been developed around the following principles:

- our statistical products will be timely, relevant and produced to the highest standards
- we will seek to improve coherence of UK statistics, while acknowledging the devolved nature of housing statistics and corresponding policy frameworks
- we will actively seek and be responsive to user feedback and insight

We have used the wider [Civil Service consultation principles](#) to help influence this statistical statement. These Civil Service principles were updated in 2016 to reflect the government's desire to engage more effectively with the public.

The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) is another key resource to help us maximise the public value of housing and planning statistics. The Code sets out how users should be at the centre of statistical production - their needs should be understood, their views sought and acted on, and their use of statistics supported.

Working across departments

A 'Cross Government Housing, Homelessness and Planning Statistics Steering Group' helps set the strategic direction for UK collaboration to improve the overall picture of housing statistics. This group includes representatives from Devolved Administrations (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) together with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, and the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

This steering group aims to drive forward improvements whilst understanding that individual countries within the UK often have separate policies and legislation relating to housing due to devolution.

To facilitate transparent processes ('T4' of [Code of Practice](#)) we have created 'cross Government work programmes' which are [publicly available](#). This is updated

regularly, accompanied by corresponding blog updates¹. We are open about progress towards meeting priorities and objectives, and welcome users' views in helping us prioritise our statistical plans.

Current user engagement initiatives

Increasing accessibility – a key focus of our work to date has been to help increase the value of our statistics by improving their accessibility. We have produced:

- A [conceptual framework](#) (png) to illustrate the areas of interest across the official statistics landscape.
- A visual [publication overview](#) (pdf) showing the statistics available by producer.
- A [spreadsheet guide](#) (xls) with detailed metadata linking directly to statistics.
- An [interactive tool](#) for homelessness statistics. This tool compares how statistics in each country of the UK are collected and gives guidance on making cross UK comparisons.
- We are also working on an interactive version of the conceptual framework, that will also help users quickly find the data sets they are looking for (*due for launch in February 2020*).

User engagement survey – In the summer of 2019 we ran a cross GSS user engagement survey. This received 140 responses from a broad cross section of users. The [common themes for improvement](#) were around geography, methodology, and accessibility.

User events – As well as individual departments and Devolved Administrations undertaking their own user engagement activities, in 2019 we focused on the UK wide perspective of our statistics at user events in Cardiff², London³ and Edinburgh⁴. We plan to continue this direct engagement and look for more opportunities to bring statisticians and users together across the United Kingdom.

Sharing best practice

We will share the outcomes of our user engagement activities across producers of housing and planning statistics, and the wider Government Statistical Service.

We will celebrate success and share lessons learnt to encourage innovation and help embed a user-centric approach to developing our statistics.

We will also look to increase our use of analytical tools, such as Google Analytics and Twitter Analytics, to observe and understand user behavior. This will include using user metrics to inform our understanding of our users and their needs. We will

¹ Blogs available here: <https://blog.ons.gov.uk/author/debra-prestwood/>

² <https://gov.wales/housing-information-group> (event on 24th January 2019)

³ <https://blog.ons.gov.uk/2019/03/13/improving-data-for-the-private-rented-sector/>

⁴ <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/PRSusereventjune2019> and <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables/homelessnessstatsuserevent>

use this information to understand the routes people take to reach our data and statistics and what their experience is when looking through our webpages.

Feedback

As producers of statistics we need to connect to users so their needs can be anticipated, and our statistics kept up to date. Feedback on any of our statistical methodologies, publications or publication processes is appreciated and help us ensure the statistics we produce help answer the questions that matter.

Please contact gss.housing@ons.gov.uk to join our mailing list.

Nick Woodhill
GSS Strategy Delivery Division
Office for National Statistics
February 2020