

Homelessness Statistics user group (HSUG)

Date: Monday 27 March 2023

Time: 11:00 – 15:00

Where: Conference Room 1, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ and virtually

Hosted by: Sara White, Emma Sigfridsson and Sam Filippi (Scottish Government homelessness statistics and analysis team)

Attendees

In-person

Emma Morgan, City of Edinburgh Council
Leigh Sherwood, City of Edinburgh Council
Alex Gilbert, Clackmannanshire Council
Rhiannon Sims, Crisis
Sarah Paterson, Dundee City Council
Christine Thomson, Falkirk Council
Helen Dryfe, Falkirk Council
Lesley Gill, Fife Council
Lyndsey Halley, Fife Council
Sandra Paton, Glasgow City Council
Dianne McKendrick, Glasgow HSCP
Alan Baxter, Inverclyde HSCP
Angela Harris, Midlothian Council
Matthew McGlone, Midlothian Council
Jules Oldham, Policy Scotland
Alice Tooms-Moore, Shelter Scotland
Alison McMaster, Stirling Council
Nicola Macleod, Stirling Council
Sara Macaulay, Stirling Council

Virtual

Elaine Lothian, Aberdeenshire
Morven MacIntyre, Argyll and Bute Council
Ashley Campbell, Chartered Institute of Housing
Alyson Smith, Dumfries and Galloway Council
Lynn Ross, East Dunbartonshire Council
Angela Kirkham, East Lothian Council
Laura Newbury, Inverclyde Council
Daska Murray, Moray Council
Apoorva Haston, Moray Council
Angela Fraser, Moray Council
Sarah Petrie, Moray Council
Claire Lloyd, North Lanarkshire Council
Linda Montgomery, Perth and Kinross Council
Lucy Herd, Perth and Kinross Council
Andy Waring, Perth and Kinross Council
Robbie Fraser, Scottish Housing Regulator
Anna McClelland, South Ayrshire Council
Linda O'Neill, South Lanarkshire Council
Carrie-Anne Alexander, Highland Council
Aodhan Byrne, Highland Council
Jennifer MacMahon, West Dunbartonshire Council
Kathryn Smith, West Dunbartonshire Council

Minute of meeting

Sara welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Agenda items: publications overview and updates and breakout session on improving outputs

Sara presented an overview of the homelessness statistics publications and asked for flash feedback on these. Details of the findings from the flash feedback can be found at [annex A](#).

There was a breakout session to allow attendees to discuss what improvements they feel are required to the outputs the homelessness statistics and analysis team produce. This was followed by feedback and discussion.

A strong theme was that different users use different elements of the published outputs, and in different ways. It was generally felt that the tables and the text were both very much still needed and were about right. Narrative is especially useful for those who aren't as close to the data, and don't know the details, but also for all to understand the wider context. Local authorities generally used the tables to understand their own position and text for the national picture. The importance of the text to communicate policy changes was also highlighted and infographics were felt to be useful too.

Local authorities noted using their own management information rather than published data for purposes such as internal reporting, but it is useful to compare the two sources. The published tables are also useful for comparisons between local authorities as well as when responding to freedom of information requests (FOIs). There was feedback that most requests and queries to local authorities are generated from the annual publication, rather than the biannual.

Feedback on the tables noted that it can be difficult to find what is needed given the data goes back so many years. However, the longer time series is still required by some users. There was a suggestion to reduce the number of years (e.g. to the most recent 5 years) for the 'publication' tables, while also having a separate document with the whole time series available. Other suggestions were to reverse the order of the table with the most recent at the left hand side, and oldest to the right and to make more data openly accessible e.g. [statistics.gov.scot](#) so users can create their own tables.

Action: Scottish Government homelessness statistics and analysis team to consider how tables with a large number of years' data can be made easier to use.

It was noted that renaming tabs slightly to make these more identifiable as relating to a particular aspect would be helpful e.g. prefix of temporary accommodation tables with a 'TA'.

There was also feedback that, for some of the tables, it can be difficult to know exactly what the definitions or parameters used are, such as which data collection data comes from, or what calculations are performed to achieve published outputs etc. Sara invited users to contact the homelessness statistics and analysis team with specific details to help identify particular tables that would benefit from enhanced notes. There was also feedback that the tables presenting data on households that are intentionally or unintentionally homeless are difficult to distinguish.

Action: Scottish Government homelessness statistics and analysis team to consider how to make tables more identifiable and consider how to present clearer information about definitions, sources and calculations used.

Action: users to provide details to Scottish Government around any further detail or clarification they would like around definitions, parameters or calculations.

Suggestions for additional analysis/data were: average time in temporary accommodation for 'live' cases; total number of temporary accommodation placements; outcomes for those who returned to previous accommodation (thinking around domestic abuse protection order); and gender. It was acknowledged that Sara had already noted work underway to consider analysis of temporary accommodation for live cases and gender. Sara pointed out there were data tables already available for number of temporary accommodation placements.

Sara reminded the group that it is possible to request ad hoc outputs if analysis they require is not available in published outputs. It will not always be feasible or appropriate to include analysis for ad hocs in publication tables.

Gaps in current data collection were identified as: local connection (to understand what other local authorities a household has a connection to, distinguishing between within and outwith Scotland/UK); ability to identify a household making multiple applications across different local authorities; disability; and deaths (as an outcome).

Sara explained that there are difficulties updating the current Scottish Government data collection system, in particular it is extremely difficult to add new questions in to the collections. The data review work will be considering ways to more easily enable such updates to collections as part of future data collection tool functionality. Sara also noted that, while local authorities are feeding back that it is most useful for all changes to be applied at once due to the time and money required to update systems, they are also requesting changes ahead of the data review.

There was a request to remove the HL2 data collection, acknowledging that HL2 and HL3 will never match exactly. Sara noted the plan is definitely still to remove this, but there are on-going difficulties getting these to align. This was further discussed as part of the subsequent agenda item.

There was a comment around how stock transfer authorities were reported, although specifics weren't provided. It was noted it could be useful to outline which these are to provide context to figures.

It was also noted that there could be better signposting to data guidance e.g. in the publication itself, so people can know where to go to understand more about the data and how it is collected and collated.

Action: Scottish Government homelessness statistics and analysis team to consider signposting to guidance and handling of stock transfer authorities.

More interactive outputs were also requested, to allow users to select which particular years or local authorities they were interested in. It was acknowledged that this would be a lot of work for the statistics team to set up and implement. Emma also noted it is difficult to

do this with the Excel tables given the accessibility requirements. However, that's not to say that the use of alternative dissemination methods couldn't be considered. It was acknowledged that time spent setting this up could be beneficial if it reduced the need for ad hoc requests, but this would require a bit of thought.

Action: Scottish Government homelessness statistics and analysis team to consider if interactive outputs area feasible.

It was noted that more (anonymised) granular level data being accessible to councils (for their own local authority (LA) data only) would be helpful, particularly around quality assurance. The homelessness statistics and analysis team noted this is something they can consider as part of the data review.

One group noted it may be useful to have a forecasting tool but acknowledged it may not be suitable to do this on a national scale.

Agenda item: data development and quality assurance

The homelessness statistics and analysis team presented data development and quality assurance considerations.

Emma ran through the updates that had been made to HL1 to capture information on Ukrainian Displaced People (UDP). No one fed back that there were any blockages preventing this being updated – over and above what has already been communicated to the homelessness statistics team previously. When queried, Emma confirmed that if UDPs had been in Scotland for more than 6 months, then a postcode of last settled address should be something other than 'UKR'. Emma also noted that information on the particular scheme was not being captured.

Sara updated on the unsuitable accommodation order (UAO) breaches data. Discussion was had around cases where the same household was considered to be in suitable and then unsuitable accommodation as a result of the change in legislation. Sara confirmed that, if a household was not in unsuitable accommodation pre legislation change, the time spent in this accommodation should not count towards the breach calculation, even if they are then in unsuitable accommodation post legislation change. Local authorities noted that it is difficult to apply changes to a system without affecting historical data.

Another query was raised as to how to handle cases where someone wasn't in unsuitable accommodation as they had been assessed as ineligible, but at a later date become eligible and therefore the placement then becomes 'unsuitable'. Sara noted that this isn't a result of legislative changes, but acknowledged it could now be more common a scenario with the extension of legislation and Brexit. It was noted that this is something that is useful to be aware of as contextual information when reporting increases in breaches.

There was a query in the chat about what has happened to the monthly UAO reporting as there had been no requests for data for January, February and March. Emma noted that this data is gathered by the homelessness policy team.

Action: Scottish Government homelessness statistics and analysis team to contact the homelessness policy team to ask for an update on the monthly UAO data collection.

Action update: completed. The homelessness policy team advised that this data is still requested monthly and they noted that additional information has been requested such as data on the number of Ukrainian and Afghan households in unsuitable accommodation.

Sam highlighted there are some local authorities which are still unable to provide data for HL3 Q12 and Q13 (children in TA) and that the plan is to have a full set of this information backdated to April 2022. Sara noted this is a pragmatic solution, even though Scottish Government (SG) would like to have had it earlier, given the difficulty the team are having in receiving this data. It was felt by some data providers that this was key to being able to remove HL2.

Sam highlighted that there are still differences between HL2 and HL3 point in time figures. An explanation was offered that, due to staff shortages, there can be a lag in closing HL3 placements, however, it was noted that for LAs that use HL3 to populate HL2, this shouldn't lead to discrepancies. However, it was acknowledged that if HL3 gets updated at a later date it may not be possible for HL2 to replicate this. It was suggested that the categories being different across the two returns could cause uncertainty and lead to discrepancies. Sara pointed out there are 'other' categories in both returns as a 'catch-all' and the totals should therefore be able to match. Sara is aware of anecdotal feedback that HL2 and HL3 contain different sets of temporary accommodation, but no one at the meeting confirmed this, or was able to provide an explanation as to why. It was flagged that further work with local authorities is planned to drill down into the reasons for discrepancies in more detail. It was noted that the data review will pick up changes required in temporary accommodation categories.

Sam outlined there were temporary accommodation placements with zero day durations and sought explanations for this. He noted he is aware of some local authorities noting this is due to placements being opened and then not taken up so closed the same day. However, discussion in the room noted this should be recorded as not taken up and therefore no exit date would be required. Some local authorities fed back they could never have such a situation as their systems don't allow exit and entry dates to match. One local authority noted genuine zero duration cases where a household can show up at 9am, use the temporary accommodation through the day and then exit before they stay there overnight.

Sam highlighted that further work to consider the quality of national insurance number and postcode will be picked up as part of the data review work.

Over lunch, feedback was gathered on whether local authorities were confident using the quarterly reports and data outputs generated by the homelessness statistics and analysis team or whether they would benefit from guidance going over the most useful tabs. Details of findings can be found in [annex B](#).

Agenda item: data review update

Emma provided an update on the data review work. No comments were received on this. Emma highlighted the opportunity for local authorities to join the data review working and topic groups.

Action: local authorities to contact Emma if they wish to join the data review working and topic groups.

Emma requested flash feedback from local authorities on what information they collect on protected characteristics. Details of the findings from the flash feedback can be found at [annex C](#).

Agenda item: collection of sex and gender reassignment data

Emma noted the paper that was circulated ahead of the meeting which outlined the proposed changes to be made to HL1 to better capture information around sex, gender and trans status.

A number of people felt that, given the person-centred approach to policy making, it would be more useful to capture 'gender' than 'sex'. Similarly, how people identify is much more relevant and important for service provision, and changes should not be data-led. Sara pointed out that the proposed changes were based on Scottish Government (SG) and Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (SFHA) guidance, anticipating local authorities would be following SFHA guidance. Some local authorities noted they do have changes in progress to align with SFHA guidance, while others noted they plan to continue to collect information on 'gender', rather than 'sex'. It was acknowledged that for SG to collect gender and not sex would therefore mean there is a gap in being able to report against the protected characteristic of sex.

It was also noted that there could be confusion between 'intersex' and 'non-binary', with someone who is not intersex, but identifies as neither male or female selecting this incorrectly. Clear guidance was therefore requested alongside any future changes.

One local authority fed back that they have removed old content so would no longer be able to repurpose an old question to collect trans status. However, it was pointed out by another local authority that a new question could be added at the local authority end.

The updated age-sex categories proposed were found to be extremely confusing to data providers and could cause issues for children, where gender and ages are essential for understanding the number of bedrooms required. For this same reason, it was felt that an option of 'prefer not to say' should not be included.

There was concern that asking housing officers to collect such sensitive information could create barriers between them and applicants. It could also be challenging for this to be collected accurately.

Some local authorities noted that changes around sex and gender would need to be agreed council-wide, or at least in relation to any other related systems. Therefore, this is not a straightforward or quick change. Local authorities noted a lead in time of 18-24 months for such changes.

There seemed to be general agreement that this could and should wait until the data review changes come in. One local authority felt there were other higher priority changes that should be made first. In the meantime, gender should continue to be collected based on how people self-identify. Sara noted there had been a number of local authorities requesting this change sooner, although nobody seemed to voice that opinion at the meeting. It was noted that the request for change had come about where this was causing validation errors e.g. an all male household with a pregnant member.

It was also mentioned that there would be difficulties for local authorities who implement changes ahead of the data review and have wider categories than male and female if the

SG data collection only allows for these two responses in their returns. An interim solution was suggested to keep the gender question and add in more response options. However, the difficulty here is back to the updating of age-gender categories in a way that makes sense, meets needs, and is feasible for the SG system to implement.

It was queried whether this would impact the PREVENT1 collection only, and if required for main applicant only or all aged 16 and over.

It is difficult to understand what a solution for all may be, given the different approaches by different local authorities. In addition, there is the complication around local authorities implementing changes at different times. The homelessness statistics and analysis team will consider how best to take this forward, given the feedback and discussion.

Action: the homelessness statistics and analysis team to consider how best to take forward changes to sex, gender and trans.

Agenda items: other updates, any other business and future meetings

Sara ran through other updates. There were no comments received on these.

The main other business which led to various discussions throughout the meeting were around local connection. In particular, there was a gap in knowing the number of applications received by a local authority where the household had a connection (only) to another local authority, and if so, which one. One local authority noted they are now gathering the 'main' local authority a household has a connection to. This is a change they have identified as needing within their own local authority. Another local authority noted they were using last postcode as a proxy, but appreciated this was not perfect.

One local authority noted they had a request for such information and it was very time consuming having to look through case notes. They asked for clarification if application or assessment date was to be used for reference. One local authority stated they were using application date.

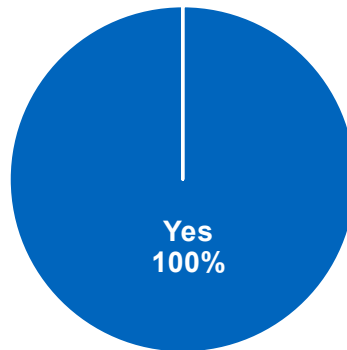
Some local authorities mentioned that their software providers will only make changes to align with SG data specifications. Sara pointed out that it would not be appropriate for national data specifications to incorporate local reporting requirements. The need for national level reporting on local connection can be taken forward as part of the data review work.

The upcoming prevention legislation was also noted and Sara clarified that the plan is to bring in all changes – including to prevention data collection - as part of the data review. However, acknowledging this needs considered thoroughly, there will be a prevention topic group to work through this as part of the review work to fully understand the practicalities of this.

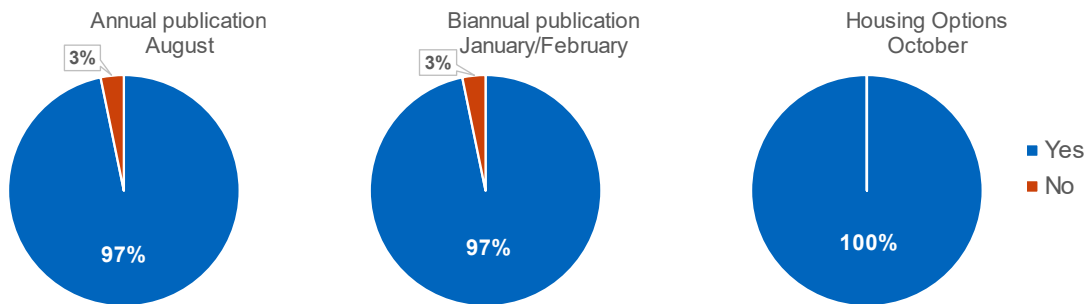
It was agreed that there will be one hybrid and one virtual meeting each year. Hybrid is useful for those attending who are too far away to attend in-person. However, it was acknowledged that better hybrid functionality would be useful for those attending virtually to better hear discussion in the room. It was felt the meetings are useful to discuss policy changes.

Annex A: Publication flash feedback

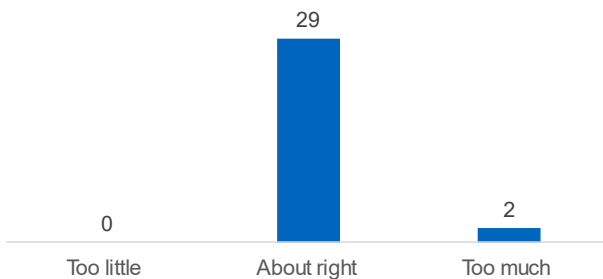
Do you like the changes we've made?
(32 responses)



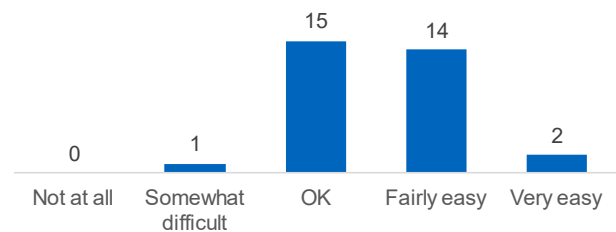
Are you content with the timing of the publications?
(31-32 responses)



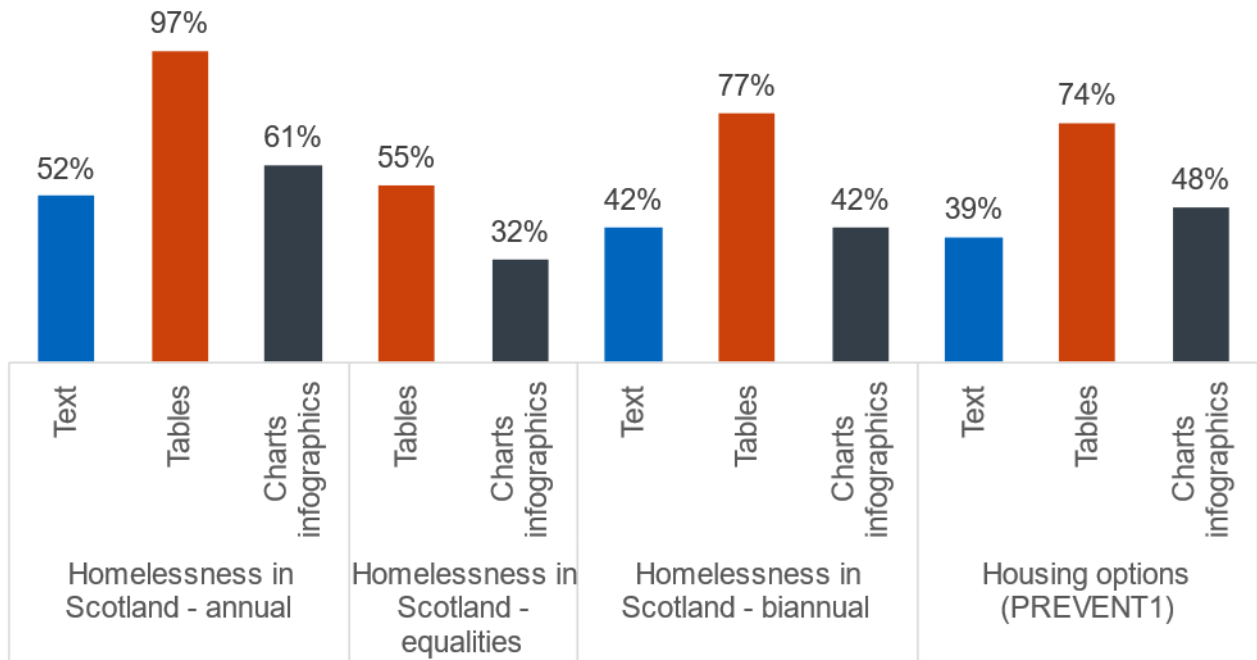
What are your thoughts on the amount of narrative we provide?



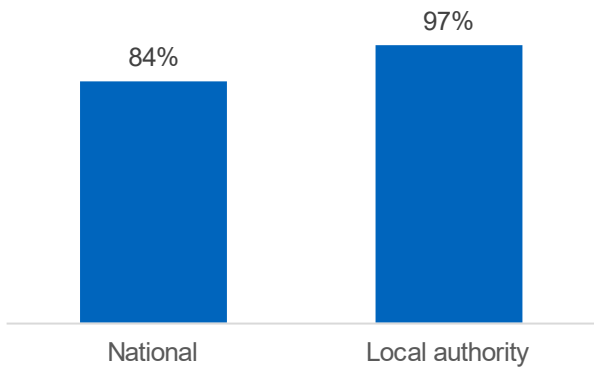
How easy is it to find what you need?



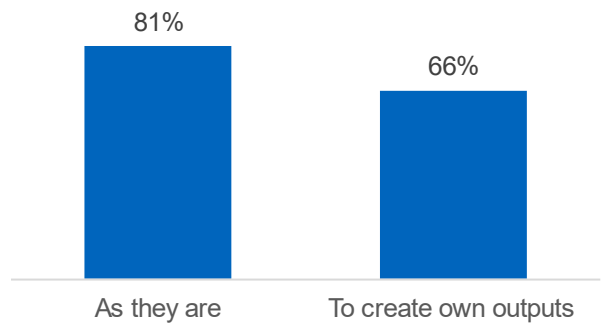
Which publications and elements do you use?
(31 responses - select all that apply)



What level of data are you interested in?
(32 responses - select all that apply)

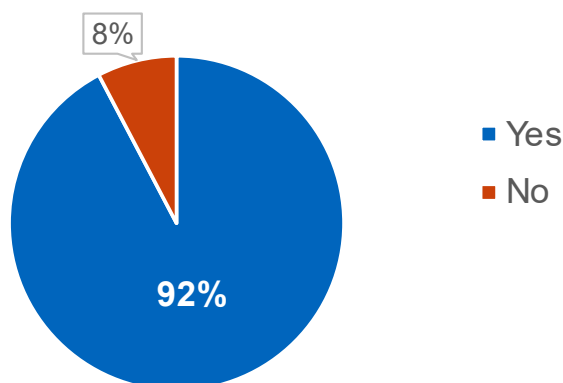


How do you use published outputs?
(32 responses - select all that apply)



Annex B: Quarterly reports and data outputs feedback

If you don't feel confident using the quarterly reports and data outputs, would you benefit from guidance going over the most useful tabs?
(13 responses)



General points:

- There is a mix between local authorities who use their reports and those who don't
- Those who do use their reports have a number of favoured tabs/data outputs to help them quality assure their data
- For those who use their HL1 quarterly report the following tables were useful:
 - HL1 breakdown for applications and assessments
 - HL1 repeats tab
- For those who use their HL3 quarterly report the following tables were useful:
 - For action
 - Open placements

There was general consensus that guidance on these reports would be useful.

Annex C: Protected characteristics flash feedback

Protected characteristics	Currently collect / planning to collect (data provider)	Interested in (data user)
Age	100% (22/22)	95% (20/21)
Disability	82% (18/22)	95% (20/21)
Gender reassignment	18% (4/22)	71% (15/21)
Pregnancy and maternity	91% (20/22)	95% (20/21)
Race	73% (16/22)	76% (16/21)
Religion or belief	41% (9/22)	52% (11/21)
Sex	91% (20/22)	95% (20/21)
Sexual orientation	36% (8/22)	62% (13/21)
Marriage and civil partnership	41% (9/22)	55% (11/20)

If not planning to collect some protected characteristics, why is that? (summary of responses)

- Lack of clarity as to what should be collected, e.g. mismatches between guidance (SG, SFHA, Census)
- Some characteristics not required for finding settled accommodation. Data should only be recorded where it is going to be used, whilst it is important from a policy point of view, may not be required from an operational point of view.
- Systems limitations, dependencies on software providers where some will only develop the system where the requirements are defined in a data specification.