UK homelessness statistics: How we are improving clarity of definitions and comparisons

Ian Boreham, Office for National Statistics

- Introduction to our teams

- Homelessness harmonisation and the interactive tool

- Improving user understanding of statistical comparability

- Cross-UK homelessness analysis

GSS Strategy Delivery Team

- The GSS Strategy Delivery Team

- Housing, Planning and Homelessness statistics

- Cross-UK Collaboration & Working Groups

- Connected Open Government Statistics (COGS)

GSS Harmonisation

- GSS Harmonisation Team is part of the GSS Best Practice and Impact Division

- Work on a number of different topics, for example Health, Gender Identity, Housing

- GSS website contains agreed survey questions ('harmonised principles') and user guidance

- Run the Harmonisation Champions Network

- Workplan approved by Heads of Profession

Government Statistical Service

Understanding the comparability of UK homelessness statistics

Why harmonise?

Improve comparability and coherence of statistics

Our strategy has three main goals:

1. Increase consistency in definitions and classifications used in data collection across government

2. Improve communication on coherence in statistical publications

3. Enhance the value of data through the integration and combination of distinct data sources

Government Statistical Service

Background

- OSR's systemic review highlighted that there was 'limited advice' about the comparability of homelessness statistics and that existing advice was 'confusing and incoherent'

- As part of cross-GSS Housing Work Programme, conducted research to develop an understanding of UK definitions of homelessness and potential for creating a harmonised definition

Stakeholder engagement

Some of the organisations that contributed to the report:

Across the four UK countries, there are differences in:

- the legal definitions used e.g. priority need

- the data collection systems used e.g. applicants vs outcomes

Report recommendations

- Develop more comprehensive guidance within statistical publications

- Create a homelessness 'conceptual framework'

- Long-term, consider how to overcome barriers to harmonisation and explore other ways to improve UK comparability

Government Statistical Service

Approach to interactive tool development

- User-focussed

- A cross-GSS effort

- Agile

- Published in order to gain wider feedback – not a finished product

User testing

- Statistical presentation experts
- Statisticians
- Design experts
- Academics
- Charities
- Non-expert users

Interactive tool demonstration

https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/homelessness/

Challenges

- Complexity

- Resource

- Maintenance

- Approach

Government
Statistical Service

Comparing official homelessness statistics across the UK
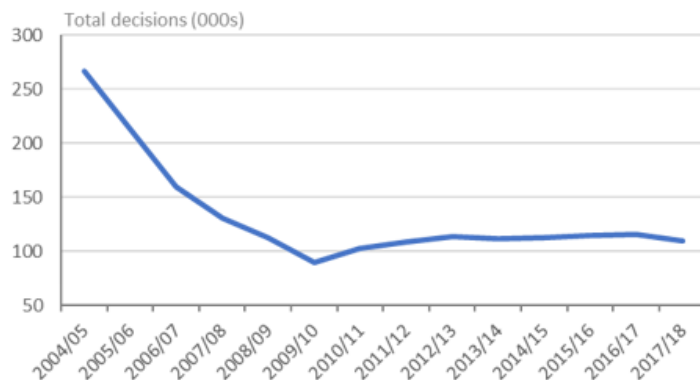
UK Homelessness: 2005 to 2018

- Why?

- UK figure for homelessness
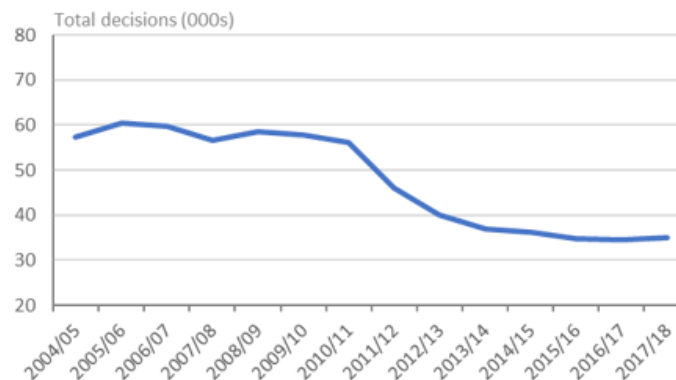
- Cross UK comparisons
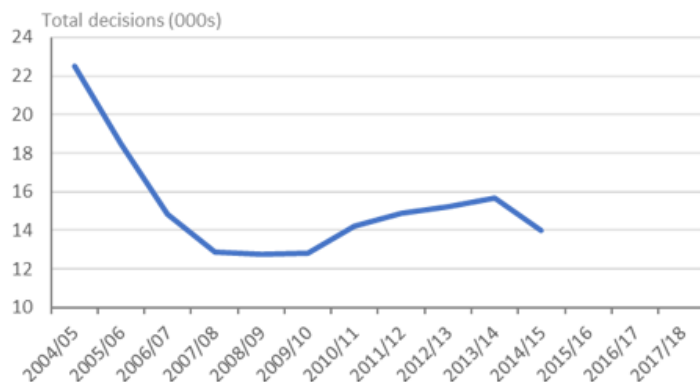
Cross UK Comparisons

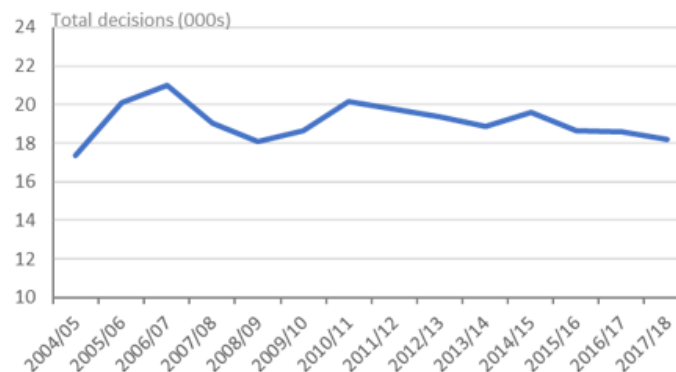Total decisions on applications:
England 2004/05 – 2017/18

Total decisions on applications:
Scotland 2004/05 - 2017/18

Total decisions on applications:
Wales 2004/05 - 2014/15

Total presentations for homelessness:
Northern Ireland 2004/05 - 2017/18

Cross UK Comparisons

- Collaboration across government

- Agreed a common language

- Found similarities and differences

Government
Statistical Service

Best
Practice
and
Impact

Coverage and feedback

Office for National Stati...
@ONS

Follow

For the first time, we're able to begin building a UK-wide picture of homelessness.

Trends in individual country data provide insight into the number of homeless households over time
ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulati...

People seeking help for homelessness has been reasonably stable since around 2012/13

2004/05

Scotland
2012/13

2017/18

Note: Lines are not to the same scale

GIF source: UK Homelessness: 2005 to 2018

Office for National Statistics

1:30 am - 17 Sep 2019

12 Retweets **17** Likes

4   12   ♡ 17

This is a great permanent resource.

Homelessness rockets among the over 60s as the number of older people seeking help rises by almost 40% in five years, alarming new figures show

- There's been a rise in older people in the UK asking for help with homelessness
- At the same time, number of people aged 16-24 asking for assistance has fallen
- According to the figures, 2,500 people over 60 have asked for help in England

Major rise in homeless older people as thousands of over-60s seek help

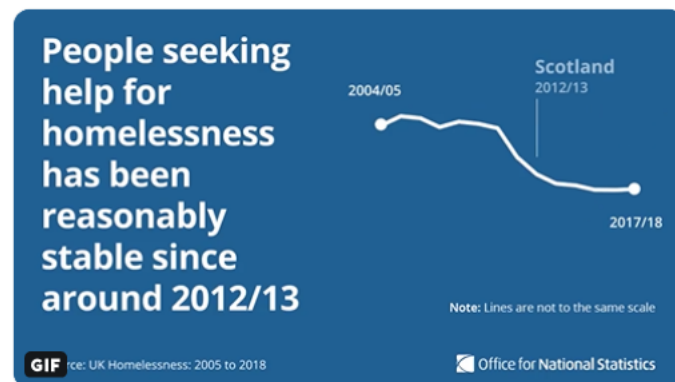ONS figures show a 39% increase in over-60s seeking help, up from 1,800 in 2012-13 to 2,500 five years later

The ONS said the data should be treated with caution due to variations in recording practices across the UK.

Government Statistical Service

Improving homelessness statistics

- Continue to work across GSS

- Set out initiatives to improve statistics

- Improve statistical guidance

- Other topics

- Harmonisation Report & Interactive tool:

  - https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/homelessness/

- UK Homelessness: 2015 to 2018

  - https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/articles/ukhomelessness/2005to2018

- Improvements to Homelessness Statistics

  - https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/improvinghomelessnessandroughsleepingstatisticsacrosstheuk

- Contacts

  - GSSHelp@statisticis.gov.uk

  - GSS.Housing@ons.gov.uk