

Rachel Murphy
English Housing Survey Team
Strategic Statistics Division
Department for Communities and Local Government
Fry Building, 2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

18th February 2015

Dear Ms Murphy,

Royal Statistical Society response to consultation on the future shape of the English Housing Survey

I am writing to provide our response to your Department's consultation on the future shape of the English Housing Survey, which was published on 21 January 2015.

The Royal Statistical Society (RSS) is a learned society for statistics, a professional body for statisticians and a charity which promotes statistics, data and evidence for the public good. We are one of the world's leading advocates of the role of statistics and data in society, which we have promoted since we were founded in 1834. Our view is that a good evidence base of official statistics is crucial to inform government and wider decision-makers about issues of public importance.

In response to your consultation, we strongly advise against the proposal to either pause the English Housing Survey (EHS) in 2015-16, or to run it on a biennial basis. This would run entirely counter to the pressing need for timely information on housing, which is a crucial issue for policy-makers and for the public, both now and for the long term. Given the projected changes in the English population over the next few decades, there will be significant changes in the country's future housing needs, and these changes will need to be properly documented by evidence. For example, the proportion of the population that is privately renting has been growing and continues to grow. The average amount paid by private renters has also increased since 2008. The survey has been key to documenting these trends, and will continue to help assess the rental market and the experience of renting in the UK.

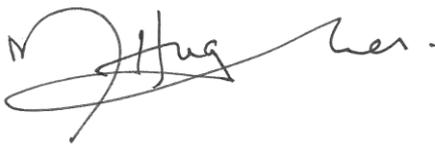
A 'pause' would also compromise the operational use of national and local information. In a letter to Bob Kerlake on 30th January, the UK Statistics Authority highlight that the survey has already been subject to cost savings (as it now combines survey data across multiple years), and is the only source of information on housing health risks, over-crowding, and under-occupation. Local authorities use the data on a regular basis to



assess local housing need, and to allocate housing. EHS data is used nationally to compile UK measures of inflation, estimation of fuel poverty, and guidance of winter fuel payments. A decision not to run the Survey in 2015/16 would mean that in 2018, the best information available on fuel poverty will be three years out of date.

The RSS' recently published [Data Manifesto](#) makes the case that we need better-resourced official statistics to meet the country's future challenges.¹ Retaining strategically important, high-quality data sources such as the English Housing Survey is central to this strategy. Although survey data collection, by nature, is not cheap, it does collect very detailed information which other sources cannot possibly provide. Given its wide use across many policy areas outside housing, we consider the English Housing Survey to be a key element of our national data infrastructure, and would urge you to continue to run it on an annual basis.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Hughes', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mike Hughes
Chair of the Royal Statistical Society's National Statistics Advisory Group

¹ The Royal Statistical Society (2014) *The Data Manifesto* [PDF]. Available at: <http://www.statslife.org.uk/images/pdf/rss-data-manifesto-2014.pdf> [Accessed: February 2015]