



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Minister for Welfare Delivery
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Clive Betts MP
Chair, Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

5 September 2022

Dear Clive,

Thank you for your follow-up letter of 13th July regarding data on exempt accommodation.

Our position to not share the poor-quality data on Exempt Housing Benefit (HB) claims is unchanged. You acknowledge that it is the Committee's intention to publish this information, and for this reason, the Department believes it is not appropriate to supply it due to the data quality, as previously set out. It is our opinion that the Department providing this data would be a tacit approval that it is of a publishable standard. We believe this would risk the strong reputation this Department has for producing high quality statistics. Indeed, following the release of this data in an earlier FOI request, despite our caveats, the data was published which resulted in media coverage using these inaccurate figures.

This is a complex area, and my officials continue to work with Local Authorities (LAs) to explore how best to improve the data. As our last letter noted, from April 2022 changes have been made to local authority IT systems to seek to improve the data gather on Exempt HB claims. New fields have been added and a more intuitive and a mandatory process has been developed. My officials will continue to work with LAs as the new data comes on stream.

These types of changes to IT systems have lengthy lead in times and are iterative, which means immediate solutions are not always possible. For example, earlier exploratory work to improve the LA data collection had started in 2018. We also need to develop our proposals in close consultation with a range of stakeholders, including Local Authorities with whom we are required to consult. Additionally, the Department has been working under intense pressure prioritising both EU Exit and Covid-related activities.

The data changes apply to new claims as a full case review of all existing HB claims was not considered proportionate. There is a high level of churn in Exempt claims, particularly we think in the short-term end of the sector, and so we do expect to see marked improvements in the data quality through new claims alone.

As mentioned above, a full case review approach was not considered appropriate which is why the changes apply to new claims only. To support continuous data quality improvements, my officials will continue to review and assess the data to determine when we think we can be confident in the quality of the data. This will involve working with LAs to test our understanding of the data as it feeds through.

DLUHC are commissioning research on the size, cost and demand of the supported housing sector. This will help to develop an up-to-date evidence base on supported housing supply. We expect to have the findings for this research by the end of 2023.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Rutley', with a horizontal line underneath.

David Rutley MP

Minister for Welfare Delivery