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28 January 2011

Dear Jill

## **RESPONSE TO ASSESSMENT OF HOUSING STATISTICS PRODUCED BY DCLG**

We would like to respond to your recent assessment of the use of national housing statistics produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government. We are writing on behalf of the Housing Studies Association, a learned society of UK housing experts. Whilst many of our members will be contacting you separately with their personal responses, we are writing on behalf of the housing studies community more generally. We would like to make the general case for the need to retain the capture of housing data during what continues to be a crucial period for housing provision, finance and policy.

### **The housing market is more important than ever before**

It has become clear that changes in a single local housing market can have global financial implications. Despite an awareness of the cyclical nature of housing markets, it is evident that shocks do occur and when they do we are taken by surprise. Understanding how these macro-economic mechanisms mix with the micro-social aspects of housing markets and housing systems will continue to be a key line of enquiry for academics, policy makers and housing market actors in the coming years.

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One of the biggest shifts in the economy and society of the UK over the last few decades has been the changing nature and role of housing. Owner occupation has continued to expand absolutely and as a proportion of the housing stock: Britain now has one of the highest rates of owner occupation in the more developed world. Furthermore, sustained price appreciation across almost a decade turned housing into a major store of wealth; among home owners housing assets account for around half of their total wealth. This accumulation of household and national wealth has a bearing on social wellbeing, as the wealth invested in owned housing provides the basis for a new form of private welfare provision in the wake of a pensions deficit, a crisis of care in older age, and a strained social safety net for a range of other welfare needs. Housing assets and home ownership therefore represent a key changing pattern of economic opportunity.

In recent times, however, we have witnessed unprecedented changes in financial markets worldwide – with the seeds of the current crises firmly sown in the housing market. As the social and economic costs of this crisis are still unfolding, it is essential that we capture the impact of these changing fortunes on households and the housing systems in the UK.

### **Concern about inequalities in the housing market demands good data**

Whilst some have benefitted from housing market gains, this wealth has become critical to increasing inequalities both within and across generations. Where housing assets are an increasing feature of government welfare spending plans, this has significant implications for those with no access to housing wealth. The economic downturn, unstable labour markets, and constraints in mortgage finance, together with the declining size of the social housing sector, highlight issues of housing affordability and housing need, exposing the limitations of the housing welfare safety net. It is crucial that social science researchers are able to monitor all aspects of the housing system and the individuals and families that are affected by it, from demand and supply, wealth and debt, housing need and household welfare. Even more critically, the nature of housing inequalities demands data that are able to distinguish the wide variations between different households even within local areas.

### **Efficiency is welcome, but too much rationalisation diminishes the value of our investment in data**

It is apparent through extensive analysis of existing UK surveys that housing is being squeezed out of these national data collection mechanisms. Firstly, this is evident through structural changes – for example, the merger of the BHPS with *Understanding Society* on the one hand, and the merger of the Survey of English Housing with the English House Condition Survey, to produce the new English Housing Survey on the other. Secondly, the loss of questions as a result of these mergers has considerable implications for time-series analyses of housing wealth, housing need and importantly housing welfare. While we understand the need to secure efficiencies, we would be concerned if this trajectory of rationalisation among the survey and data infrastructure were to continue.

**Good data is essential to allow communities to formulate and evaluate local actions**

The depth and spread of housing data is an important component of the interdisciplinary nature of our research, and essential for considering the wider policy implications of the provision of housing stock, security of tenure and home ownership, affordability of housing across all sectors and availability of housing wealth as an asset base for welfare. Having good data that permits robust and comparative analysis between places will be a cornerstone of attempts to monitor the impact of moves toward greater localism throughout government. As local communities take greater responsibility for the governance of their localities and local services, they will need the support of access to data which allows them to evaluate the impact of their actions. We would therefore urge that great consideration and effort is made into maintaining and preserving the depth of housing data that is collected at a national level.

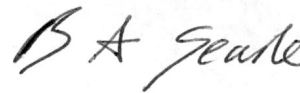
Yours sincerely,



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