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21st July 2016

Dear Ed

Temporary Suspension of National Statistics designation for Homelessness Statistics in Wales, 2015-16

I am writing following recent discussions between my staff and Mark Pont regarding the potential temporary suspension of the National Statistics badging for Homelessness Statistics in Wales.

The Welsh Government has collected and published data on Homelessness in Wales for a number of years. This information is collected from local authorities on a quarterly basis. Summary information is published on a quarterly basis, detailed analysis are available in an annual Statistical First Release, and all data are published on Stats Wales. Our Homelessness data outputs were assessed as part of the UK Statistics Authority's Assessment of Welsh Government Housing Statistics and designated as National Statistics ([report](#) published September 2011)

Recent legislative changes have impacted on our Homelessness Statistics data collection. The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 (which became law in Wales on 17 September 2014) included a number of changes to homelessness legislation aimed at reducing levels of homelessness, by placing its prevention at the centre of local authority duties to help people at risk. The new legislation was introduced on 27 April 2015 and replaced the previous legislation, Part VII of the Housing Act 1996, which had come into force in January 1997.

The data collected and published on statutory homelessness from April 2015 onwards has changed in order to reflect the new legislation and is therefore not directly comparable with that collected and published under the previous legislation. But the process for collecting the homelessness data from local authorities has not changed.

Whilst we had originally planned to publish annual 2015-16 homelessness data in July 2016, we postponed this publication to allow additional time for quality assurance. It has become apparent during the collection of 2015-16 homelessness statistics that some local authorities faced difficulty in providing complete and accurate data. This is for a variety of reasons, including the implementation of new legislation, new processes and new IT systems. Some local authorities had also misunderstood what was required in the earlier part of the year – for example, not realising that multiple outcomes could and should be recorded for one individual.



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During the course of the year, we issued additional guidance, and held workshops for local authority contacts in order to discuss the difficulties they faced in collating the data, to clarify definitions and to discuss the collection of this data in future years.

Following our recent discussions with local authorities, we are confident that the problems faced during the 2015-16 data collections are largely resolved going forward. We have been assured that local authorities have implemented changes to their processes and IT systems, and will be able to complete accurate and consistent data in future years.

However, there remain quality issues with the 2015-16 data. We have worked closely with local authorities to improve the quality of the data submitted, and considerable resource has been allocated for this purpose – both within the Welsh Government and within Local Authorities. However, there is a limit to the improvements that can be made – particularly retrospectively to the 2015-16 data.

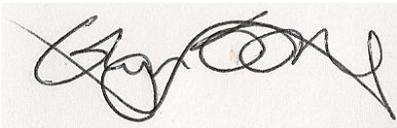
Although the previous statistics were designated as National Statistics it is my assessment that given the concerns over data quality I would be unable to provide the assurance specified under the new toolkit for quality assurance of administrative data. We therefore feel that the most appropriate course of action would be to seek temporary de-designation of the Homelessness Statistics data for 2015-16. This would include our StatsWales data cubes, our quarterly headlines and the forthcoming Statistical First Release. We are committed to ensuring that end users of the data are made aware of our concerns and will include a comprehensive explanation of the data quality issues within the annual statistical release as well as providing notification on Statistics Wales.

Section 14 of the Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007 states that we are unable to de-designate our own outputs from National Statistics without the UK Statistics Authority determining that the statistics do not comply with the Code.

We remain confident that the difficulties faced should be resolved going forward. We will allocate sufficient time to quality assure the data submitted for the first quarter of 2016-17. If we are satisfied that the data is of sufficient quality, I will write a further letter asking for the temporary suspension of the National Statistics badging to end.

I would be happy to discuss any of these matters further if you would like more details.

Yours sincerely



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Chief Statistician



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