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Dear Ed

### **Request to end the temporary suspension of the National Statistics designation for Homelessness Statistics in Wales**

I am writing following recent discussions between my staff and your team regarding ending the temporary suspension of the National Statistics designation for Homelessness Statistics in Wales. The statistics were temporarily de-designated last year (ref my letter to you dated 21 July 2016).

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 analyses are available in an annual Statistical First Release, and all data are published on StatsWales.

Recent legislative changes impacted on our Homelessness Statistics data collection from April 2015 onwards and it became apparent during the collection of 2015-16 homelessness statistics that some local authorities faced difficulty in providing complete and accurate data. This was for a variety of reasons, including the implementation of new legislation, new processes, new IT systems and the fact that multiple outcomes could and should be recorded for one individual.

During the course of the 2015-16 year, we issued additional guidance on the data collection form, 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. Last summer, we were confident that the problems faced during the 2015-16 data collections were largely resolved going forward. However, given that we still had concerns about the 2015-16 data, and the inability of many local authorities to retrospectively revise their 2015-16 data, we sought temporary de-designation of the output.

During the past twelve months, we have continued to work 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. In addition to automatic in-built validations on the data collection form, each authority's data collection form has been separately quality assured in detail, during each quarterly period. We challenged local authorities wherever appropriate and sought explanations for changing trends in the data. Within a strictly controlled environment, we invited policy colleagues with detailed knowledge of local authority practices to review the annual data, and again any anomalies were queried with local authorities. In some



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cases, this led to local authorities acknowledging an error/inconsistency and providing corrected data. In other cases, we received an explanation as to the changing trend.

An additional item of data on 'Total number of assessments' was collected from April 2016 onwards. Whilst we are confident of the quality of the other homelessness data, we remain concerned about this specific item. Some authorities are currently unable to capture this information accurately, and there is variation in the figures (some of which is due to different approaches in the implementation of the homelessness legislation). This item will not be published until we are satisfied of its quality. We plan to issue additional guidance on this item shortly.

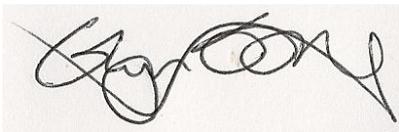
Our main concerns with the 2015-16 data related to the timing of the implementation of new legislation, new processes (for example counting multiple outcomes) and new IT systems. We are satisfied that these were not an issue for 2016-17. Because of the additional work outlined above, we are now confident that we can accurately comment on the quality and limitations of the data.

For the forthcoming publication of 2016-17 data, we will ensure that we provide a full explanation as to the quality and limitations of the data, including an explanation of the adjustment made to one local authority figures. Over the course of the next year, we also plan to continue discussions with policy and Welsh Local Government Association colleagues on ways of working with local authorities to continue to improve the quality of the data and to share best practice. We will also review the guidance documentation.

It is my assessment that I am now able to provide the assurance specified under the new toolkit for quality assurance of administrative data, and am formally seeking to re-instate the National Statistics designation.

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

Yours sincerely



**Glyn Jones**

Chief Statistician



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