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Welsh Government

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Dear Ed

Temporary Suspension of National Statistics designation for Social Service publications

I am writing following discussions over the last six months between my staff and yours regarding the potential temporary suspension of the National Statistics designation for some of our Social Service publications.

Significant changes in policy set out in the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act have had an affect on the national social services data collections and statistical releases. In response to these policy changes, new national social services data returns were finalised for 2016-17, in line with implementation of the Act from 6 April 2016. Data collection forms and accompanying guidance were published on the Welsh Government website from October 2015.

To support the first year of implementation of the Act, local authorities provided a sub-set of the national datasets on assessments on a quarterly basis to Welsh Government. This provided an opportunity to test data collection ahead of the main annual collection so as to inform changes or improvements in the data measures or guidance, and support monitoring by local authorities and Welsh Government policy officials.

Analysing the quarterly data highlighted potential differences in interpretation of data requirements and reporting across local authorities. Statistical and policy officials met regularly with local authority contacts and answered numerous queries to support the collection of new data. Statistical officials held dedicated data collection workshops in winter



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2016 to go through the new data returns and gain feedback from local authority contacts in relation to any difficulties in reporting.

Concerns were raised about the quality of the data being reported, which came from: the recognition that a large-scale change in practice will take time to implement; that data collection systems needed to be changed to capture new data and would be based on potentially differing understanding of requirements; the impact of the introduction of the new Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) computer system on ability to make information available; and the need for more clarity around some specific data requirements.

As the year progressed, greater agreement was reached in interpretation and where necessary guidance was amended to clarify reporting requirements and improve consistency in reporting across local authorities in future years.

A significant amount of quality assurance of the data has raised many queries with the LAs, many of which were answered. Some of those queries have resulted in changes, but some have not. Continuing with further quality assurance of the data would not lead to substantial improvements in quality and would be a significant commitment of Welsh Government and local authority staff resource.

In light of the quality issues highlighted above, I have concluded that for several of the new collections data will only be published at a Wales level with no accompanying sub-national detail. For the performance measures, we recognise that there is a requirement for local authorities to understand where they are in relation to others. So we will be publishing Wales level data with averages and quartile boundaries from the local authority data. This will give users of the data and Local Authorities an indication of the variance across local authorities, which will be caveated with accompanying explanations as to why local authority data has not been published.

Since I cannot provide the requisite assurance around the quality of the entirety of the statistical dataset, and the reduction in public value as a result of our decision not to publish local authority data for some measures, we believe that those statistical releases based on the new 2016-17 data returns should be considered as experimental to reflect to users that in this first year the quality of the data is lower than we would expect or like. The table at Annex 1 gives the collections and releases and which ones we wish to de-designate.



Following the first year, the collection process and publication for all new national returns will be reviewed and once data quality is understood to be better, we will re-assess the designation of these statistics with your team.

More recently there have been media reportsⁱ of 'data manipulation' of children's social services data in one local authority. We have sought the assurances of that local authority that their data returns for the purposes of official statistics are accurate. We have received some assurances and have requested more formal assurance of their data. I want to emphasise that our decision to de-designate and not publish some local authority data pre-dates these media reports.

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

Yours sincerely



Glyn Jones

Chief Statistician



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Annex 1: Summary of social services data collections and statistical publications

Data return	Publication	Planned publication month	De-designate?
Performance measures	Social services performance measures	October 2017	New output
Looked after children census	Children looked after by local authorities in Wales	October 2017	Yes
Children receiving care and support aggregate	Children receiving care and support in Wales	October 2017	Yes
Children receiving care and support aggregate	Local authority Child Protection Registers	February 2018	No
Children receiving care and support aggregate	Private fostering in Wales	November 2017	No
Adults receiving care and support	Adults receiving care and support in Wales	October 2017	Yes
Adult safeguarding	Adult Safeguarding	November 2017	No – Currently badged as Official Statistics
Staff of local authority social services departments	Local authority social services - Staff numbers in Wales	November 2017	No
Disability registers	Local Authority Registers of People with Disabilities, Wales	November 2017	No
Children receiving care and support census	Wales Children receiving care and support census	February 2018	Yes
Children receiving care and support census	Local authority Child Protection Registers	February 2018	No

Those publications highlighted in red are new for 2016-17 based on a new data collection.

Those publications highlighted in blue are based on new data sources for 2016-17 but the content is fairly similar to previous years.

Those publications in green haven't changed from 2015-16 and will remain as Official Statistics.



ⁱ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-41651441> , <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-politics-41666462>



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