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**Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead**

Stephanie Howarth  
Chief Statistician  
Welsh Government  
(by email)

3 August 2023

Dear Steph

**Homelessness accommodation and rough sleeping management information**

We recently completed our review of your [Homelessness accommodation provision and rough sleeping monthly management information](#) against the pillars of the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). We have shared our findings with your analysts and I appreciate their positive engagement during this process. This letter presents our findings, including feedback to consider alongside the further planned development of these data.

These important data were first collected during the Welsh Government's efforts to protect those experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness or sleeping rough during the COVID-19 pandemic. Welsh Government's [Ending homelessness in Wales: a high-level action plan 2021 to 2026](#) notes that these data have helped to provide a clearer understanding of all forms of homelessness in Wales, which would otherwise be masked through sofa surfing, living in overcrowded homes or unconventional dwellings.

Our findings against the three pillars of the Code of Practice for Statistics – Trustworthiness, Quality and Value – are as follows.

*Trustworthiness*

- Welsh Government analysts have transparently published data on homeless people and rough sleepers supported during the pandemic since June 2020. These data continue to provide valuable insights to users and decision makers about some of the most vulnerable people in society. The approach that your analysts have taken is very much in line with OSR's guidance on [intelligent transparency](#).
- Your team told us that these data were initially published as management information due to a need to better understand potential quality issues. However, all aspects of the data's production are now carried out in line with the Code of Practice. This includes, for example, that publications are publicly pre-announced and that access to the final data is managed in line with Pre-Release Access legislation. To help signal the significant public value of these data and support their further development, our view is that these data should in future be published as official statistics. We are pleased that the team is open to taking this forward.
- We welcome the team's openness in recently publishing its plans for the further development of these data, including to publish more-detailed data at local authority level. Being transparent about future plans ensures that users are aware of changes before they take place and can feed into the developments.

- Your analysts mentioned a potential need for disclosure control has come up in recent discussions about publishing more-detailed data. It's good that the team are considering options for the suppression of small numbers to prevent individual people that are homeless or rough sleeping being identified in the data.

### *Quality*

- Some helpful key quality guidance points are published alongside the data to support their appropriate interpretation and use. These include, for example, advice that the latest month's data are provisional, and that users should avoid putting too much emphasis on data for an individual month, or when making comparisons with previous months. They also help users to understand uncertainties and differences in a range of related data by stating that users should avoid comparisons with your separate statutory [Homelessness statistics](#) or [National rough sleeper count](#), due to differences in the methods used for each series. The team told us they are further extending their understanding and commentary on quality and uncertainty, which will help the appropriate interpretation and use of the data. This includes working with local authorities to determine key quality issues and develop the guidance.
- It would also help to provide further reassurances about quality to users, for your analysts to communicate details of the quality checks that are undertaken, and their judgements about how the data should or should not be used. This should be based on their understanding of known strengths, limitations or uncertainties in data quality, to support users in its appropriate interpretation. The team might find OSR's [Quality Assurance of Management Information](#) guidance useful as it does this.
- Your analysts should also consider what further detail on the methods used needs to be published to support users' understanding – including, for example, how local intelligence is used to determine the estimates provided, or the approaches used to ensure that different local authorities record data in a consistent manner. This will help users to understand differences between the methods used for the monthly data and your other published homelessness series.

### *Value*

- We welcome that the team is further developing the monthly bulletin by publishing a greater range of the data already collected – including, for example, new data on the main reasons reported for homelessness and types of temporary accommodation provided from July 2023, and additional data at local authority level later in 2023. This will allow users to obtain further valuable insights from data already collected.
- It may help to extract more public value from these data for the team to consider how its future outputs might best support a holistic view of homelessness and rough sleeping as a topic, for example, by considering how developments to the monthly data could complement the statutory homelessness statistics. It should also consider the overall presentation and detail provided across the range of its homelessness outputs. For example, the level of detail in the monthly data is limited compared to the statutory homelessness statistics, which include expanded commentary, analysis, graphics and quality information. The team should seek feedback from a range of users to maximise the value added from such future improvements, so that users' insight and presentation needs can be accounted for.
- The team told us that Welsh Government's forthcoming [Ending Homelessness outcomes framework](#) is likely to lead to changes across the full range of its homelessness and rough sleeping outputs. The team are also reviewing the potential benefits of implementing a case-level approach to measuring homelessness in Wales. They are also considering how to limit the impact of any

changes in terms of additional burden on local authorities. As the team develops its longer-term strategy and plan for future homelessness statistics in Wales, OSR supports your short-term ambitions to develop the monthly homelessness and rough sleeping data in a proportionate way. This will minimise additional burdens on local authorities, while the team explores the value that new approaches, such as case-level data, may offer for understanding homelessness outcomes in Wales.

- The team recently held a useful workshop to discuss further developments to the data with 45 representatives from Welsh local authorities and Welsh Government policy teams. The team told us that participants engaged openly about how to support the further development of the data and supporting guidance. We recommend that the team engages openly with a broad range of users around future developments related to both the monthly data, and the new Ending Homelessness outcomes framework. This is so that all users are aware of these plans, can contribute their views, and the public value of these developments is maximised.

I would like to thank your team for their positive engagement on this review. Our Housing, Planning and Local services team will continue to liaise with your analysts as they take this work forward, especially in the context of the wider suite of data about homelessness.

I am copying this letter to Luned Jones, Rachel Dolman and Rachel Shepherd-Hunt, the responsible analysts.

Yours sincerely



Mark Pont  
Assessment Programme Lead