

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Housing in Wales

(produced by the Welsh Government)

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About the UK Statistics Authority

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*. Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the *Code of Practice*. The *Code* is wide-ranging. Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

Designation as National Statistics should not be interpreted to mean that the statistics are always correct. For example, whilst the *Code* requires statistics to be produced to a level of accuracy that meets users' needs, it also recognises that errors can occur – in which case it requires them to be corrected and publicised.

Assessment reports will not normally comment further on a set of statistics, for example on their validity as social or economic measures. However, reports may point to such questions if the Authority believes that further research would be desirable.

Assessment reports typically provide an overview of any noteworthy features of the methods used to produce the statistics, and will highlight substantial concerns about quality. Assessment reports also describe aspects of the ways in which the producer addresses the 'sound methods and assured quality' principle of the *Code*, but do not themselves constitute a review of the methods used to produce the statistics. However the *Code* requires producers to "seek to achieve continuous improvement in statistical processes by, for example, undertaking regular reviews".

The Authority may grant designation on condition that the producer body takes steps, within a stated timeframe, to fully meet the *Code's* requirements. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the *Code*.

The Authority grants designation on the basis of three main sources of information:

- i. factual evidence and assurances by senior statisticians in the producer body;
- ii. the views of users who we contact, or who contact us, and;
- iii. our own review activity.

Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, it may withdraw the Assessment report and revise it as necessary.

It is a statutory requirement on the producer body to ensure that it continues to produce the set of statistics designated as National Statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*³. The report covers the following National Statistics produced by the Welsh Government:

- *Housing Demolitions and Hazards*⁴,
- *Private Sector Renewal Activity*⁵,
- *New House Building and Social Housing Sales*⁶,
- *Social Housing Stock, Vacancies and Lettings*⁷,
- *Social Housing Rents and Rents Arrears*⁸,
- *Homelessness*⁹,
- *Social Landlords Possessions and Evictions in Wales*¹⁰.

1.1.2 The Act also allows Ministers to request an assessment of other official statistics in order for them to gain National Statistics status. The following statistics are covered in this report, in response to such a request:

- *Affordable Housing Provision in Wales – First Release*¹¹,
- *Affordable Housing Provision in Wales, Analysis – Statistical Bulletin*¹²,
- *Dwelling Stock Estimates*¹³.

1.1.3 This report was prepared by the Authority's Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics listed in 1.1.1 are designated as National Statistics, and has determined that the statistics published in the products listed in paragraph 1.1.2 can be designated as new National Statistics products, subject to the Welsh Government implementing

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

² http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/housing/demolition/?lang=en>

⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/housing/renewal/?lang=en>

⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/housing/newbuild/?lang=en>

⁷ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/housing2010/1011171/?lang=en>

⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/housing2010/101117/?lang=en>

⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/housing/homeless/?lang=en>

¹⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/housing/possessions/?lang=en>

¹¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/housing2010/101124/?lang=en>

¹² <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/housing2011/110330/?lang=en>

¹³ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/housing/stock/?lang=en>

the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by January 2012.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 The statistical releases are well written and structured but there is little explanation of trends or of differences between local authority areas. There is insufficient information on the methods used to produce the statistics and on their strengths and limitations in relation to potential uses.
- 1.3.2 Responses to our request for comments (as part of this assessment) suggest that these statistics are widely used and that liaison with data suppliers is generally good. However, some social landlords operate on a very small scale and the Welsh Government may need to consider how it can engage more effectively with this group in order to convince them that the effort of data collection is worthwhile.
- 1.3.3 A limited amount of data is published in Excel spreadsheets alongside the statistical releases and there is also some data available on the StatsWales¹⁴ area of the website. The Welsh Government is committed to providing more data through StatsWales by the end of the year: this should improve the availability of disaggregated data and time series.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the Welsh Government could strengthen its compliance with the *Code*. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

Requirement 1	Take steps to engage with a wider range of users and document the uses made of the statistics (para 3.3). In meeting this requirement, seek views from third sector organisations before taking a decision on the future of <i>Social Landlords Possessions and Evictions</i> , and publish a summary of the responses (para 3.4)
Requirement 2	Work with the other administrations in the UK to identify and document differences in the methods used to produce housing statistics (para 3.9)
Requirement 3	Publish more information about the methods used to produce housing statistics, and about their quality

¹⁴ <http://statswales.wales.gov.uk/index.htm>

and reliability in relation to the range of potential uses (para 3.12)

Requirement 4

Publish more information about the derivation of baseline estimates of the dwelling stock from each Census and about the calculation of dwelling stock estimates between Censuses (para 3.19)

Requirement 5

Improve the commentary in the statistical releases by including more information about the policy and operational context (para 3.28)

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 *Housing Demolitions and Hazards* is an annual release that presents statistics on the number of dwellings demolished in each local authority (LA) area and the condition of residential dwellings as assessed under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System¹⁵. The statistics are used by the Welsh Government to monitor the number of private sector dwellings that have been improved to an acceptable level during the year. LAs use the statistics for strategic and service planning and to monitor the effect of area based initiatives. The statistics also feed into the production of *Dwelling Stock Estimates*.
- 2.2 *Private Sector Renewal Activity* is published annually. It presents statistics on the amount of financial help provided to private owners and tenants for home improvement and repair under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002¹⁶. The release also provides statistics on the number and value of mandatory disabled facility grants¹⁷ (DFGs) and the amount and type of expenditure in renewal areas. The statistics are used to monitor progress against the National Housing Strategy¹⁸ objectives and to monitor trends in activity undertaken by LAs to improve the quality of housing stock within each area. The Welsh Government uses the statistics on DFGs in its local government settlement calculations. LAs use the statistics to monitor trends and to identify discrepancies between needs and supply.
- 2.3 *New House Building and Social Housing Sales* is a quarterly release that presents information on the number of new dwellings started and completed in Wales. The data are based on the reports of local authority building inspectors and the National House Building Council¹⁹ (NHBC). The release also includes information about the number of sales of LA and Registered Social Landlord (RSL) dwellings through Right to Buy²⁰ or Right to Acquire²¹ legislation and other schemes. The statistics are used by the Welsh Government and local authorities to assess the level of new house building and social housing sales across Wales and to monitor trends in the overall level of housing stock and changes in tenure distribution over time. Sales data also feed into the annual determination of social housing rents. Recently the statistics have been used to support the development of legislation relating to affordable housing²².
- 2.4 *Social Housing Stock, Vacancies and Lettings* is an annual release that presents statistics on the amount of stock held by LAs and RSLs, the number of vacancies within that stock and the number and type of lettings made during the year. The statistics are used to monitor trends in the level and types of

¹⁵ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/hhrsoperatingguidance>

¹⁶ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2002/1860/contents/made>

¹⁷ http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/DisabledPeople/HomeAndHousingOptions/YourHome/DG_4000642

¹⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/housing/strategy/publications/strategydoc/?lang=en>

¹⁹ <http://www.nhbc.co.uk/>

²⁰ http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/HomeAndCommunity/BuyingAndSellingYourHome/HomeBuyingSchemes/DG_4001398

²¹ http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/HomeAndCommunity/BuyingAndSellingYourHome/HomeBuyingSchemes/DG_186954

²² http://www.assemblywales.org/bus-home/bus-legislation/bus-leg-measures/bus_legislation_measure_housing.htm

social housing available at a local and national level and to match this against current and future need. The vacancies statistics are used to provide an indication of turnover and waiting times in the social sector. LAs and RSLs use the statistics to benchmark performance, identify best practice and ensure best use of social housing stock. The statistics also feed into the production of *Dwelling Stock Estimates* at both Wales and LA level.

- 2.5 *Social Housing Rents and Rents Arrears* presents annual statistics on the average weekly rents by dwelling type and size for wholly rented LA and RSL dwellings. It also presents statistics on social housing rent arrears. The statistics are used by the Welsh Government to monitor trends in average weekly rents for all social housing stock and the number and proportion of social housing tenants in arrears. The statistics are used by LAs and RSLs to monitor compliance with rent benchmarking requirements.
- 2.6 *Homelessness* is a quarterly release that presents statistics on LAs' actions under homelessness legislation²³. It provides information on the number and type of households that were accepted as homeless and the reasons why these households were homeless. It also provides information on the number of households in temporary accommodation. The statistics are used by the Welsh Government, homelessness agencies and other housing organisations to monitor trends in the overall level of statutory homelessness across Wales. Some homelessness statistics are also used in calculating the local government settlements. LAs use the statistics for planning, monitoring and managing the demand for services; monitoring progress against national and local Homelessness Action Plans; and informing strategic decisions about housing development.
- 2.7 *Social Landlords Possessions and Evictions in Wales*, published annually, presents statistics from LAs and RSLs on possession orders and warrants for eviction obtained against their tenants during the year and the number and type of tenants leaving their home as a result of eviction warrants. It also presents statistics on other types of legal action taken against tenants such as anti-social behaviour (ASB) orders and injunctions. The statistics contribute to the evidence base for the development of government policy regarding rent arrears and other breaches of tenancy. Social landlords use the statistics to monitor the effectiveness of ASB procedures and to identify support needs and re-housing implications.
- 2.8 *Affordable Housing Provision in Wales – First Release* and *Affordable Housing Provision in Wales, Analysis – Statistical Bulletin* are produced annually. The bulletin is published a few months after the first release and provides more detailed analysis. Data are collected from LAs, RSLs and National Park Authorities. The first release presents statistics on the number of additional affordable housing units provided and an estimate of the number planned for delivery over the following two years. The bulletin also provides contextual information on house prices, affordability and changes to the level and tenure of stock over time. The statistics were developed to monitor the delivery of

²³ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2001/607/contents/made>
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2006/650/contents/made>

affordable homes in relation to the target set out in the *One Wales* strategy²⁴. The statistics are also used by the Welsh Government, LAs and RSLs to monitor trends in the amount, types, location, provider and funding of affordable housing over time.

- 2.9 *Dwelling Stock Estimates* presents annual estimates of dwelling stock numbers in Wales by tenure and LA. The estimates are calculated using data from population censuses and are updated annually to take account of gains and losses. The breakdown of stock by tenure is calculated using data from the 2001 Census²⁵, the Labour Force Survey²⁶ and data received from local authorities and RSLs. The statistics are used by the Welsh Government, LAs and housing organisations to monitor trends in the overall level of housing stock in Wales, as well as changes to tenure distribution over time. The statistics are also used in *New House Building and Social Housing Sales* to show the ongoing impact of new builds and sales on the tenure distribution of current dwelling stock.
- 2.10 The affordable housing and dwelling stock releases are relatively new products and none of the other releases have existed in their current form for more than eight or nine years. However, the collection of data on statutory homelessness began as a result of legislation in the 1970s; house building statistics were first produced in 1946; and estimates of the dwelling stock date back to the first Census in 1801. The Welsh Government estimates that the production of the ten outputs costs £51,000. This covers the management of the data collection process and the production of outputs, but not the time spent on user engagement, consultations or development activities, or the time spent by data providers.
- 2.11 Much of the data for the releases was previously collected by the Local Government Data Unit²⁷. The Welsh Government took over responsibility when this arrangement came to an end in April 2010, and it has since been cleaning and restructuring a number of the datasets. This has delayed the uploading of some of the data onto StatsWales and has contributed to the current lack of long term trend data in a few of the releases (e.g. homelessness). Responses to our requests for comments suggest that it has also resulted in a degree of confusion among some users as to where to find information.
- 2.12 The Welsh Government is currently consulting on proposals to reduce the scope of its housing data collections²⁸. These proposals include reducing the frequency of *New House Building and Social Housing Sales* and of some items in the homelessness release from quarterly to annual; and ceasing to produce *Social Landlords Possessions and Evictions*. The consultation document states that the resource freed up by implementing these proposals may be used to develop one or two priority areas of work. We understand that one possibility is a new data collection on the activities of local authorities in preventing

²⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/about/history/onewales/?lang=en>

²⁵ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/census2001.asp>

²⁶ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Source.asp?vlnk=358>

²⁷ <http://www.dataunitwales.gov.uk/Home.asp?lang=en>

²⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/statistics/housingdata/?lang=en>

homelessness: this would include assistance to people who do not meet the statutory criteria and do not therefore feature in the homelessness statistics.

3. Assessment findings

Principle 1: Meeting user needs

The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public.

- 3.1 The Welsh Government consults users and data suppliers through a Housing Information Group, which meets every 2-3 months. Much of the membership of this Group comes from central and local government and from the RSL sector, although there is also some representation from academics and umbrella bodies. Invitations were recently extended to Shelter Cymru and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and both have now joined the group. From time to time sub groups are set up to make recommendations on specific issues. We suggest that papers for these meetings be published promptly on the website and that members of the group be encouraged to canvass views from other organisations in their sector.
- 3.2 Users were consulted about several data collections in late 2010 and the responses were published on the website²⁹: these exercises covered house building, housing renewal, affordable housing and housing management. Information is currently being collected from Welsh Government policy staff, LAs, RSLs and others about their use of housing statistics and their priorities, as part of a data rationalisation exercise. We have been told that the results of this work will be published.
- 3.3 Our own requests for comments on the statistics generated a good response (annex 3) and were helped by an email alert from the Housing Statistics Network³⁰, which is a user group affiliated to the Royal Statistical Society. However, there were few responses from third sector organisations, academics or the private sector, indicating that there may be scope for more engagement with users and potential users in these sectors. Most of the external users on the contact lists supplied by the Welsh Government belonged to either the Housing Information Group or the Welsh Statistics Liaison Committee (whose membership is confined to public bodies). As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should take steps to engage with a wider range of users and document the uses made of the statistics³¹ (Requirement 1). In documenting uses of the statistics, we suggest that the Welsh Government refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority's Monitoring Brief, *The Use Made of Official Statistics*³².
- 3.4 The Welsh Government told us that it may discontinue *Social Landlords Possessions and Evictions* because similar data are available from the Ministry of Justice. However, unlike the data collected from landlords, MoJ statistics do not differentiate between LAs and RSLs and do not provide the grounds for possession (rent arrears, anti social behaviour, other). It is also difficult to track outcomes, as many possession actions do not result in eviction. The statistics

²⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/housingcommunity/?lang=en&status=closed>

³⁰ <http://housingstatisticsnetwork.org/>

³¹ In accordance with Principle 1 Practices 1 and 2, and Protocol 1 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

³² <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/index.html>

team believes that these details are rarely used because they generate relatively few web hits or queries, and the supply of such data can be burdensome for landlords with a large number of properties, as it requires tracking of cases across housing and legal departments. However, statistics on possession actions for rent arrears and anti social behaviour are likely to be of interest to tenants, pressure groups and political representatives and the Welsh Government's own use of the data was mentioned in para 2.7. In meeting Requirement 1, the Welsh Government should seek views from a wide range of users including third sector organisations before taking a decision on the future of this output, and publish a summary of the responses.

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

Official statistics, and information about statistical processes, should be managed impartially and objectively.

- 3.5 The statistical releases are published in an orderly manner and in accordance with the rules on pre-release access. They are available free of charge on the internet.
- 3.6 The Welsh Government consults users when proposing substantial changes to methods or classifications. A response is published³³ alongside each consultation announcing the decisions made and a link is inserted in the appropriate release.
- 3.7 The Welsh Government has a general revisions policy³⁴, with which the housing statistics comply, although we were told that they are not subject to scheduled revisions. Corrections of errors and revisions resulting from the replacement of imputed data with providers' estimates are clearly identified within the tables and an explanation is provided within the Quality Information section of the release. Errors are dealt with according to published procedures with users notified through email and a notice placed on the Welsh Government's website. These procedures were followed when an error was discovered in *New House Building and Social Housing Sales* published in January 2010³⁵.

³³ <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/statistics/housingrenewal/?lang=en&status=closed>

³⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/revisions/?lang=en>

³⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/housing2010/100420/?lang=en>

Principle 3: Integrity

At all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.

- 3.8 No incidents of political pressures, abuses of trust or complaints relating to professional integrity, quality or standards were reported to or identified by the Assessment team.

Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.

- 3.9 The team producing the statistics keeps in touch with its counterparts in the other administrations and has sought to learn from their experience (for example, when developing the affordable housing releases). However, not all the releases indicate whether similar statistics are available for other parts of the UK, and none of them state whether the statistics from the other administrations are broadly comparable. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should work with the other administrations to identify and document differences in the methods used to produce housing statistics³⁶ (Requirement 2). We suggest that the Welsh Government signpost similar statistics for other parts of the UK and include summary comparisons in releases where this would assist users.
- 3.10 Data are collected from LAs and RSLs on spreadsheets submitted through a secure website. Copies of the data collection forms and guidance notes³⁷ are available on the main website but are not linked from the statistical releases. We suggest that this be done to help users to interpret the published statistics.
- 3.11 Some validation checks are built into the spreadsheets in order to resolve obvious errors before the data are submitted. Other checks are carried out by the Welsh Government's data collection team.
- 3.12 The releases do not include much information about methods or the strengths and limitations of the statistics. In most cases there is no description of the extent and nature of imputation for missing data, or any discussion as to whether the 22 LAs and around 110 RSLs who supply most the data are applying consistent definitions. The statistics team is preparing a quality report covering nine of the ten outputs³⁸. This is a welcome step, but we think that there is a need for more specific information on each topic, drawing attention to any known limitations. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should publish more information about the methods used to produce housing statistics, and about their quality and reliability in relation to the range of potential uses³⁹ (Requirement 3).
- 3.13 The Welsh Government told us that it is looking into the possibility of seasonal adjustment for the homelessness statistics, and also for house building. We suggest that it publish a summary of its research and conclusions.
- 3.14 The affordable housing releases explain that the statistics cover additions from new house building, purchases, acquisitions, leasing or conversions and that they are presented gross of any losses to the stock. The additional units range from traditional social rented housing to various forms of low cost home

³⁶ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 6 of the Code of Practice

³⁷ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/data-collection/housing/?lang=en>

³⁸ The exception being the dwelling stock estimates, which are compiled in a different way. In this case, the Welsh Government is planning to include more information in the release itself.

³⁹ In relation to Principle 4, Practices 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice

ownership. The basis for inclusion - explained in a separate technical note for planning staff⁴⁰ - is that the home should remain affordable for future eligible households or that any subsidy should be recycled to provide replacement affordable housing provision. We suggest that the Welsh Government include this definition in the affordable housing releases and clarify whether it means that the purchase of an existing social rented property (or a share in such a property) by the sitting tenant counts as an addition to the affordable stock⁴¹.

- 3.15 Data on house building starts and completions are provided by local authorities and by the National House-Building Council, as buildings can be certified by either. The statistics do not include data from other Approved Inspectors⁴². These have been operating since the late 1990s, and in England are now thought to account for around 8 per cent of starts and 4 per cent of completions. The statistics team assured us that there are very few approved inspectors in Wales but that they will look into the possibility of collecting data should the contribution from this source become significant.
- 3.16 The team is also aware that it is difficult for inspectors to identify housing that is being built for RSLs, resulting in underestimates of RSL starts and completions, and corresponding overestimates of private sector activity. This issue will be addressed in an article later this year, following a pilot study of RSLs. We also asked whether the statistics on starts and completions are consistent (allowing for time lags). The team told us that it has looked into this and considers that the figures are reasonably consistent over a ten year period, although a very small number of completions may be missing.
- 3.17 The statistics team has not carried out any recent comparisons of the data it collects from social landlords on possession actions and evictions with the statistics published by MoJ. Our assessment of statistics on housing in England noted that the Department for Communities and Local Government had found discrepancies between the two sources of data. We suggest that the Welsh Government review the consistency of the data collected on possession actions and evictions by social landlords in Wales with the data collected by MoJ.
- 3.18 The Welsh Government estimates the size of the dwelling stock by adding year on year changes to the base provided by the Census. We were told that this method is preferred to deriving estimates from council tax information because of the need for a tenure split.
- 3.19 The annual changes are derived from data on new build, demolitions, conversions and changes of use. Additional information from the Labour Force Survey, LAs and RSLs is used to estimate the tenure split. No further details are provided of these calculations or of the components of change; nor is information published about how the dwelling counts in Census output tables are actually derived, or the effect of changing definitions from one Census to the next. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should publish more information about the derivation of baseline

⁴⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/planning/policy/tans/tan2/?skip=1&lang=en>

⁴¹ As happens in England – see Assessment Report 117

⁴² New build housing must be approved by an inspector. Building control was originally undertaken by LAs. The NHBC became involved in the 1980s, and other Approved Inspectors in the late 1990s.

estimates of the dwelling stock from each Census and about the calculation of dwelling stock estimates between Censuses⁴³ (Requirement 4).

⁴³ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*. A similar requirement was addressed to DCLG in Assessment Report 117

Principle 5: Confidentiality

Private information about individual persons (including bodies corporate) compiled in the production of official statistics is confidential, and should be used for statistical purposes only.

- 3.20 The Welsh Government has assured us that it takes all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of the data it collects. This includes receiving data from providers in aggregate form through a secure data transfer website called AFON⁴⁴. This website is controlled via a username and password login, and is restricted to certain IP addresses. AFON has recently been enhanced to improve the level of security it provides.
- 3.21 Following a risk assessment, the statistics team has recently started to apply disclosure control to the homelessness statistics. This will avoid the risk of revealing personal information when breakdowns at LA level are disseminated via StatsWales later this year.

⁴⁴ www.afonwales.org.uk

Principle 6: Proportionate burden

The cost burden on data suppliers should not be excessive and should be assessed relative to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.

- 3.22 The estimated costs of responding to statistical surveys are published⁴⁵ on the Welsh Government's website. The data collections that underpin the statistics in this assessment are listed individually. We were told that there is no duplication between the statistical data collections and the data collected by the Welsh Government's Regulation Unit in respect of RSL activities.
- 3.23 The statistics team told us that the relative burden of providing housing data has shifted from LAs to RSLs in recent years (this is partly because 9 of the 22 local authorities have transferred housing stock to RSLs). Much of the RSL stock is held by some 10-15 landlords, with many of the remainder being responsible for a small number of properties and employing few, if any, full time staff. In order to manage the burden on the smaller RSLs the Welsh Government has introduced a short annual questionnaire, which is being used to ensure that each landlord only receives relevant data collection forms (when a form is not relevant, a nil return is completed on their behalf). From the responses we received, we think there may also be a need to provide data suppliers with a better understanding of why the data are needed and how the resulting statistics can be used. We suggest that the Welsh Government consider whether some of the statistics could be disseminated in a way that would be of particular value to small RSLs and their tenants. We understand that the StatsWales datasets will be a step in this direction.
- 3.24 A data rationalisation exercise has been completed and the need for any new data collections is explored through the HIG working groups. As noted in para 2.12, a current consultation is proposing to reduce further the amount or frequency of data collection in some areas. This may free up capacity to provide new statistics where a need has been identified.

⁴⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/compliance/?lang=en>

Principle 7: Resources

The resources made available for statistical activities should be sufficient to meet the requirements of this Code and should be used efficiently and effectively.

- 3.25 We were told that the production of these statistics is sufficiently resourced, although the Assessment Team feels that resources may be thinly spread.
- 3.26 The Welsh Government participates in the Government Statistical Service's recruitment schemes and uses a competency-based framework to manage staff performance. This involves assessments of continuing professional development, and six-monthly performance reviews.

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

Official statistics, accompanied by full and frank commentary, should be readily accessible to all users.

- 3.27 The separate statistical series provide a fairly comprehensive overview of local authority and RSL activity, but cannot readily be combined to give an overall picture of trends in supply (for example, whether the total stock of affordable housing is increasing or decreasing) and whether this is keeping pace with changes in housing needs and demand. We suggest that the Welsh Government publish a conceptual framework document to enable users to understand how the available statistics relate to each other and to the operation of the housing market. The statisticians could use this framework to examine whether the existing statistical series represent the best way of reporting on supply and demand.
- 3.28 As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should improve the commentary⁴⁶ in its statistical releases on housing by including more information about the policy and operational context (Requirement 5). We suggest that in meeting this requirement the Welsh Government should consider the points detailed in Annex 2.
- 3.29 We understand that the availability of disaggregated and time series data should improve later this year, once more of the data are available on StatsWales.

⁴⁶ In relation to Principle 8, Practices 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice

Protocol 1: User engagement

Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value. This Protocol draws together the relevant practices set out elsewhere in the Code and expands on the requirements in relation to consultation.

3.30 The requirements for this Protocol are covered elsewhere in this report.

Protocol 2: Release practices

Statistical reports should be released into the public domain in an orderly manner that promotes public confidence and gives equal access to all, subject to relevant legislation.

- 3.31 In compliance with the *Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Wales) Order 2009*⁴⁷, the Welsh Government publishes on its website lists of people who have pre-release access⁴⁸ to its individual statistical publications.
- 3.32 Scheduled releases are announced⁴⁹ 12 months in advance, although the Affordable Housing First Release is not currently on the list. All releases are available through the National Statistics Publication Hub.

⁴⁷ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2009/2818/schedule/paragraph/1/made>

⁴⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/prerelease/?lang=en>

⁴⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/du/du-theme/housing/?lang=en>

Protocol 3: The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes

Administrative sources should be fully exploited for statistical purposes, subject to adherence to appropriate safeguards.

- 3.33 Although the data collected from LAs and RSLs are ultimately derived from administrative sources, they are collated and supplied by these bodies in aggregate form, on specially designed spreadsheets. They are not therefore included in the Welsh Government's Statement of Administrative Sources⁵⁰.
- 3.34 There are precedents elsewhere for extracting record level data from administrative systems - for example, statistics on housing association lettings and sales⁵¹ in England, and Scottish homelessness⁵² statistics. Such an approach permits more detailed investigation of the statistics (including longitudinal analysis) and may have the potential to reduce the compliance burden. We suggest that the Welsh Government investigate the feasibility of doing this in the longer term, and publish the findings.

⁵⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/compliance/administrative/?lang=en>

⁵¹ <https://core.tenantservicesauthority.org/>

⁵² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/RefTables>

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the Welsh Government, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| Suggestion 1 | Publish Housing Information Group papers on the Welsh Government's website and encourage members of the group to canvass views from other organisations in their sector (para 3.1) |
| Suggestion 2 | In meeting Requirement 1, refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority's Monitoring Brief, <i>The Use Made of Official Statistics</i> (para 3.3) |
| Suggestion 3 | Signpost similar statistics for other parts of the UK and include summary comparisons in releases where this would assist users (para 3.9) |
| Suggestion 4 | Link each statistical release to the relevant data collection forms and guidance notes (para 3.10) |
| Suggestion 5 | Publish a summary of research and conclusions on the introduction of seasonal adjustment into the homelessness and house building statistics (para 3.13) |
| Suggestion 6 | Include the definition of affordable housing in the relevant releases and clarify whether this means that the purchase of an existing social rented property (or a share in such a property) by the sitting tenant counts as an addition to the affordable stock (para 3.14) |
| Suggestion 7 | Review the consistency of the data collected on possession actions and evictions by social landlords in Wales with the data collected by the Ministry of Justice (para 3.17) |
| Suggestion 8 | Consider whether some of the housing statistics could be disseminated in a way that would be of particular value to small RSLs and their tenants (para 3.23) |
| Suggestion 9 | Publish a conceptual framework document to enable users to understand how the available statistics relate to each other and to the operation of the housing market. Use this framework to examine whether the existing statistical series represent the |

best way of reporting on supply and demand (para 3.27)

Suggestion 10

Consider the points detailed in Annex 2, in seeking to improve the statistical releases (para 3.28)

Suggestion 11

Investigate the potential for extracting record-level data from administrative systems, and publish the findings (para 3.34)

Annex 2: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Releases

- A2.1 In October 2010, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Releases*⁵³. Whilst this is not part of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, the Authority regards it as advice that will promote both understanding and compliance with the Code. In relation to the statistical releases associated with statistics on housing in Wales, this annex comments on compliance with the statement on standards.
- A2.2 In implementing any Requirements of this report (at paragraph 1.5) which relate to the content of statistical releases, we encourage the producer body to apply the standards as fully as possible.

Appropriate identification of the statistics being released

- A2.3 Some of the releases could make stronger statements about what is not included: for example, *Homelessness* could point out that the count does not include many homeless people who do not meet the statutory criteria, and *Private Sector Renewal Activity* could make it clearer that the statistics only cover local authority expenditure in this area. Not all of the titles of the releases state that the statistics are for Wales. When the statistics span two years, it is not clear whether the period referred to is a financial year or otherwise.
- A2.4 Each release, except *Affordable Housing Provision in Wales Statistical Bulletin*, provides a date for when the statistics will next be updated. The releases do not specifically state whether they are annual or quarterly but frequency is implied. For example, *Dwelling Stock Estimates* states that the estimates are "...as at end of March each year."
- A2.5 Standard headings and logos are used where appropriate, although in some of the releases headings such as 'quality information' and 'glossary' include important material on methods, coverage or context that might be better presented under separate headings.
- A2.6 The releases clearly identify the producer organisation and include the name and contact details of the responsible statistician. The one exception is the affordable housing bulletin, which does not include the name of the responsible statistician.
- A2.7 The releases contain very brief outlines of what is included, either explaining what data are collected or which statistics are presented. There are no lists of contents that would help users locate information on methods, quality, definitions etc. and find details about the sections, tables and charts within the releases.
- A2.8 Revisions to previously published statistics are clearly identified and explained. For example, in *Social Housing Rents and Rent Arrears (2010)*, the statistics for 2009-10 have been revised as a result of resubmitted data from providers.

⁵³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-releases.html>

However, *Social Landlords Possessions and Evictions* identifies revised figures in one table, with no explanation as to why they have been revised. None of the releases are marked as provisional thereby implying that the data have been finalised. Where data have been estimated or imputed, this is clearly noted in the release.

Include commentary that is helpful to the non-expert and presents the main messages in plain English

A2.9 The releases contain summary bullet points highlighting the key messages.

A2.10 In general the language within each release is straightforward. Technical terms are explained in glossaries and the individual entries are clear and helpful. However, there is often no reference to the glossary within the main commentary, and a few technical terms are not explained (for example, 'demotions' in *Social Landlords Possessions and Evictions*).

A2.11 The commentary, tables and charts within most of the releases describe or illustrate trends, but with little information about possible reasons. Regional variations are identified but there is no discussion or explanation. However, *Affordable Housing Provision in Wales Statistical Bulletin* provides good contextual commentary and analysis of the statistics.

Use language that is impartial, objective and professionally sound

A2.12 The text used in all releases is impartial and does not endorse or criticise government policy.

A2.13 The descriptive statements are consistent with the statistics.

Include information about the context and likely uses

A2.15 With the exception of *Affordable Housing Provision in Wales Statistical Bulletin*, there is relatively little contextual information in the First Releases. For example, in *Social Landlords Possessions and Evictions* it would be helpful to have a short section that explains the court process and possible outcomes: this information has to be gleaned from the glossary at present.

A2.16 The releases contain little information about the quality and reliability of the statistics in relation to potential uses. The description of these uses can be a little bland (the statistics on 'x' are used to monitor 'x') and do not convey the true extent and variety of uses and users.

Include, or link to, appropriate metadata

A2.17 There is a limited amount of information on methods provided within the releases. For example, *Homelessness* refers to a quarterly statistical return but

does not explain whether the data collection is a sample survey or from administrative sources.

- A2.18 The differences from related Welsh Government releases are explained within *Dwelling Stock Estimates*. However, there are no links to similar statistics from other UK countries in some of the releases and no information about comparability.
- A2.19 The changes to the statistics as a result of the re-weighted Labour Force Survey are clearly explained within *Dwelling Stock Estimates*. The release also indicates a change of data source in 2008-09 but the implications of this are not explored.

Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A3.1 This assessment was conducted from February to August 2011.

A3.2 The Assessment team – Jill Barelli and Rachel Beardsmore – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the Welsh Government in February. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 30 March 2011. The Assessment team subsequently met the Welsh Government during June to review compliance with the *Code of Practice*, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

A3.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare assessment reports.

A3.4 The Assessment team received 90 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Type of respondent	User	Supplier	User and supplier
Local authority*	7	20	18
Housing association**		21	15
National park authority		1	2
Central government	4		
Charities, pressure groups	1		
Private sector	1		
Total	13	42	35

* Responses were received from 17 of the 22 Welsh local authorities, some of whom sent in multiple responses - as users (6 LAs); suppliers (11 LAs) and in both roles (13 LAs). Multiple responses occurred because different people in the LA were using and/or supplying data for different combinations of the 10 products.

** HA respondents ranged from almshouse societies with a handful of properties to bodies associated with the large scale voluntary transfer of local authority housing stock.

A3.5 Local authorities told us they were using the statistics to benchmark, share good practice, support policy decisions, respond to Member and press queries and to produce some of the policy documents that they are required to write (for example, local housing market assessments, housing strategies, annual monitoring reports and local development plans). Authorities that no longer own housing stock were also using the data to monitor the work of RSLs in their

area. Some RSLs said they used the data for self assessment, benchmarking and business planning. Other RSLs said they had no use for the statistics.

A3.6 Timeliness was an important issue for LAs needing to prepare some of the above reports by set deadlines. A number of LAs and RSLs mentioned a need for outcome and performance indicators: we understand that work in this area is being taken forward by the Welsh Local Government Association. Other respondents said they would like more house condition data, more on private rents, dwelling type, protected characteristics (such as ethnicity, and disability) and more disaggregation (for example, by area and tenure).

A3.7 Most suppliers (with the exception of smaller RSLs) said that they would collect similar data for their own purposes, although the Welsh Government sometimes required different categories or levels of detail which could be time consuming to provide. Some suppliers said that they were not clear what the Welsh Government did with the data, or what benefit is derived from them. However, there were many comments that the team was helpful when dealing with queries.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

