



Office for
Statistics Regulation

Systemic Review Programme

The quality and public value of adult social care statistics in Wales

June 2019

Office for Statistics Regulation

We provide independent regulation of official statistics produced in the UK. Statistics are an essential public asset. We aim to enhance public confidence in the trustworthiness, quality and value of statistics produced by government.

We do this by setting the standards they must meet in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). We ensure that producers of official statistics uphold these standards by conducting assessments against the Code. Those which meet the standards are given National Statistics status, indicating that they meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and value. We also report publicly on system-wide issues and on the way statistics are being used, celebrating when the standards are upheld and challenging publicly when they are not.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all the individuals and organisations that gave up their time to contribute to this Review. Their details are listed in [Annex 1](#).

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Executive summary

Why we did this review

- ES1. The Office for Statistics Regulation has been exploring the quality and public value of adult social care statistics in the United Kingdom. This report presents the findings for Wales.
- ES2. Adult social care can affect and improve the lives of many people. Society has changed greatly over the last few decades, so it is important to understand more about how social care is currently delivered and how this might need to change in the future. Central and local government, health and care services and other agencies can use statistics to steer policy decisions and ensure suitable budgets and workforce are in place to deliver the intervention needed at the right time. We want to support the innovations and improvements to data capture, analysis and dissemination that are already happening, so that the statistics reflect the lived experience of people using social care services.

What we found

- ES3. Our investigations revealed that adult social care statistics in Wales are in a state of flux following policy changes in 2016 and the introduction of new data collection systems. Statisticians within Welsh Government have been proactive in identifying these issues and in highlighting to their users the problems affecting the quality of the data. Further planned changes to the Code of Practice in relation to measuring social services' performance will lead to new data being collected from April 2020. This, alongside likely ongoing issues with the data collection systems, means that it is currently unclear when exactly the current situation regarding the statistics will be fully resolved.
- ES4. Users of the statistics told us that they have several questions that the current statistics don't answer. They also highlighted concerns around the quality and value of the statistics. Quality concerns largely centred around the effects of the policy changes and the introduction of the new data collection systems. Value concerns related to gaps in the statistics, difficulty in understanding and interpreting them, and a lack of comparability over time resulting from the many changes affecting the statistics.


Next steps

- ES5. Recognising the current situation with the statistics, we have outlined steps Welsh Government should take to address users' concerns and drive up both the quality and value of the statistics. Welsh Government has committed to tackling these issues as fully as possible as they revise the data to be collected and the resulting statistics to be published.
- ES6. We will maintain contact with Welsh Government as their statisticians continue to work to resolve the issues affecting these statistics. We will also engage further with users of the statistics to ensure that their voices are heard, and planned improvements meet their needs.

Introducing the review

Our interest in adult social care statistics

- 1.1. The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) is clear that statistics add value when they support society's need for information. In the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) we have been exploring the quality and public value of adult social care statistics across the UK.
- 1.2. Our previous work with users of health and social care statistics indicated that adult social care statistics tend to be less well developed than health statistics. We heard from users that there is a growing need for better quality statistics to understand how social care operates, including topics such as waiting times, access routes, funding, effectiveness, staffing and client experiences. Such information is necessary to inform policy, and workforce and budget allocation, as well as providing guidance for individual users for whom these matters are relevant. These are critical issues of high public interest where good statistics are vital to policy and service delivery.



'Value means that statistics and data...support understanding of important issues'
Code of Practice for Statistics

How we conducted the review

- 1.3. Our review of [Adult Social Care statistics](#) across the UK began in 2018. We wanted to explore the adult social care statistics landscape across the UK to better understand its strengths and weaknesses, recognising that policy variations across the UK have led to differences in how statistics are produced. We were also keen to increase our understanding of users' needs for statistics about adult social care, and to discover and share best practice in the compilation, harmonisation, data linking potential, publication and statistical commentary of these statistics.
- 1.4. Responsibility for the funding and delivery of adult social care lies with the devolved administrations in each of the UK's countries. Consequently, our review mainly focused on issues specific to each country, to reflect the different environments in which statistics producers work and the policy needs resulting from this. In February 2019 we published a blog and high-level findings for all four countries. This report presents our findings for Wales in more detail. Separate reports for England and Scotland will be published later in 2019, along with a summary bringing together common learning for all statistics producers. We have closed the Northern Ireland strand of the review as there is currently no government, which means that progressing and developing new policy and associated statistics is very difficult.

Background to social care in Wales

- 1.5. In general, adult social care can be defined as the provision of social work, personal care, protection or social support services to adults in need or at risk. A broad range of adults with needs arising from illness, disability, old age and/or poverty use social care. Statistics on adult social care present information on a variety of topics including:
 - Adult social care services
 - Social services performance
 - Adult social care expenditure
 - Reports of abuse or neglect received by local authorities
 - Caring for others, such as family members, friends or neighbours

- Adult social care workforce

- 1.6. In July 2018 Welsh Government published [A Healthier Wales: our Plan for Health and Social Care](#), in response to a Parliamentary Review commissioned by the Welsh Government, with cross-party support. The review made a strong case that a service based mainly on a medical model of health, and a separate system of social care, is not fit for the future. It recommended a 'wider and more creative combination' of national support, incentives, benchmarking, regulation, accountability and transparency.
- 1.7. In response to this, the Plan sets out a long-term future vision of a 'whole system approach to health and social care', which is focussed on health and wellbeing, and on preventing illness. The Plan states that:

“We will build on the philosophy of Prudent Healthcare¹, and on the close and effective relationships we have in Wales, to make an impact on health and wellbeing throughout life. We will have a greater emphasis on preventing illness, on supporting people to manage their own health and wellbeing, and on enabling people to live independently for as long as they can, supported by new technologies and by integrated health and social care services which are delivered closer to home.”
- 1.8. New legislative powers in Wales have also led to the creation of several new Acts in recent years. Most notably, the [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) came into force in April 2016. The Act provides the legal framework for improving the well-being of people who need care and support, and carers who need support, and for transforming social services in Wales.
- 1.9. Our research in Wales took this changing policy and practice landscape into account and we framed our questions accordingly. To inform our research we spoke to 14 users of adult social care statistics from nine organisations across Wales. These users represented a range of local and national government and charitable organisations. In addition, we also met with statistical leads working in this area within Welsh Government. These conversations took place during July, August and September 2018. A summary of organisations that contributed to the review is provided in [Annex 1](#).

¹ The idea of 'prudent healthcare' was developed by the Bevan Commission in 2013 in response to the challenge of how to improve healthcare during times of austerity. It has since become a major health strategy for the Welsh Government.

What we found

Issues with existing statistics

Statistics should be based on the most appropriate data, limitations should be assessed, minimised and explained

2.1. There are currently seven statistical publications relating to adult social care in Wales. Three of these are classified as experimental statistics and four as National Statistics (see the box below). Experimental statistics are published at an early stage in their development so that users can be involved in assessing their suitability and quality. National Statistics is the label given to statistics that have been found to be fully compliant with the Code of Practice for statistics, following an assessment by OSR.

Existing official statistics about Adult social care in Wales

Adult Safeguarding	Experimental statistics
Adults receiving care and support	Experimental statistics
Social services performance measures	Experimental statistics
Local authority revenue and capital outturn expenditure	National Statistics
Barriers faced by disabled people (National Survey for Wales)	National Statistics
Volunteering and caring (National Survey for Wales)	National Statistics
Delayed transfers of care	National Statistics

2.2. The implementation of the [Social Services and Well-being \(Wales\) Act 2014](#) led to significant policy changes, which mandated a different set of performance measures for local authorities. Data collection systems were changed to capture the new data, and the Welsh Community Care Information System (WCCIS) was introduced.

2.3. Following the implementation of the Act there were significant data quality issues related to both the effect of the large-scale change in practice and the impact of the introduction of WCCIS on the ability to make information available. These problems led to Welsh Government making changes to several of their releases to help users understand that the quality of the data was lower than would be expected or desired:

- “Adult safeguarding” was re-labelled as experimental statistics instead of official statistics. The release contained a note explaining that this change reflected “the scale of change happening in social services and system changes for the first year of data collection”.
- “Adults receiving care and support in Wales”, a new release for 2016/17, was also published as experimental statistics, again with an explanatory note. Not all local authorities were able to provide complete returns and one was unable to provide any data at all. This local authority provided data after publication of the 2016/17 release, and so figures were revised for the 2017/18 publication.
- The “Social services performance measures” release was also a new output for 2016/17 and was again published as experimental statistics. Figures were only published at national level. Some local authorities did not follow guidance and reported incorrectly, while some were unable to report at all. Comprehensive information for users was provided on these issues.

- 2.4. Although some progress was made in addressing these issues for 2017/18, there were ongoing issues with the roll-out of the WCCIS. Alongside this, new performance measures, with new underpinning data, are planned for April 2020 to reflect the impact of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act on people who need care and support and carers who need support. In light of this, the three releases have continued to be published as experimental statistics for 2017/18, again with incomplete data and with explanations of the issues affecting the quality of the data.
- 2.5. The Chief Statistician at Welsh Government wrote to OSR in [October 2017](#) and again in [October 2018](#) about the issues affecting the statistics and decisions surrounding the status of the publications. In November 2018 OSR [replied to Welsh Government](#) encouraging them to make sure their publications are clear about the limitations of the data and plans for improvement, so that users understand how the statistics can be used appropriately.
- 2.6. More recently, Welsh Government has informed us that it is reviewing its Code of Practice in relation to the performance and improvement of social services. It is planning to introduce a new Performance and Improvement Framework that has been designed to support local authorities to evidence their progress against the Quality Standards that all local authorities should be working towards. Welsh Government is seeking views on the revised Code of Practice and associated Framework via a [consultation](#). Following this, the social services data to be collected will be reviewed. We strongly encourage analysts within Welsh Government to involve themselves as much as possible in this review process, to ensure that the new data and resulting statistics are designed from the outset to be high quality and to meet users' needs.
- 2.7. New data underpinning the revised Code of Practice and Performance and Improvement Framework will be collected from April 2020, with the first statistics being published in autumn 2021. The WCCIS has not yet gone live for all local authorities and it is likely that issues with the system and consistency of reporting will continue over the coming years. This being the case, Welsh Government does not currently feel in a position to decide when they will remove the experimental statistics label and seek National Statistics designation for their publications. We are encouraged by the positive steps already taken by Welsh Government in relation to the issues affecting the statistics and consider this to be a pragmatic approach to take under the circumstances.
- 2.8. As part of its review, Welsh Government is considering the development of an Adults Receiving Care and Support Census in addition to the data gathered through the Performance and Improvement Framework. This would enable data to be collected and monitored at an individual level, where currently only aggregate level data are available. Although this proposal is only at the consultation stage, individual level data would represent a welcome development for adult social care statistics in Wales, allowing users to draw a greater level of insight from the data than is currently possible.
- 2.9. As part of the overall review of adult social care statistics, OSR also completed a compliance check of the Local authority revenue and capital outturn expenditure release. Through this check we identified that Welsh Government was not taking sufficient steps to assure users of the quality of the data, and that the statistical bulletin was difficult for a less expert user to understand. We [wrote to Welsh Government](#) outlining our findings and requesting that improvements are made by July 2019 in order for this publication to retain its National Statistics designation.

Users' concerns about adult social care statistics in Wales and recommended actions for Welsh Government

Users' concerns about value

Questions that can't be answered using existing statistics:

- What is the prevalence of conditions that can result in people needing social care?
- How effective are interventions and services, and what are their outcomes?
- How much does Welsh Government spend on adult social care?
- How does performance differ across local authorities?
- What are people's experiences of using adult social care?

Other gaps and issues with the statistics:

- There are several gaps in the official statistics as they stand, including, but not limited to:
 - a lack of seasonal data
 - limited regional breakdowns
 - no presentation of the data by demographic factors such as age or socio-economic status
 - no information on cost-effectiveness
 - little independent sector data
 - no data on the impact on the third sector.
- The annual releases are not timely enough.
- The publications are accessible, but it is difficult to understand what the data represent.
- The current dataset has little value since there is no baseline, due to the changes in 2016.
- Further changes planned for 2020 mean that the figures will be incomparable again.

What Welsh Government should do to improve value

- Bring together statistics from different sources (health, welfare) to tell a more complete story.
- Devise a way to measure the effectiveness and outcomes of interventions.
- Publish information about the costs and cost effectiveness of interventions and services.
- Devise and publish relevant performance information about all local authorities.
- Devise and publish robust measures of people's experiences of using adult social care services.
- Publish data with demographic and geographic information.
- Consider improving the timeliness of the data, to enable users to understand the current picture.
- Take steps to ensure the data can be used to project the future picture.
- Explain the data more clearly, so that they are easy for a less expert user to understand.
- Take steps to ameliorate the lack of continuity between data collections.
- Devise a way to publish data about transitions between health care and social care.
- Devise a way to collect data about independent social care providers, unpaid carers, and the support given to carers by the third sector.

Users' concerns about quality

Issues largely related to the impact of the implementation of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014


- Patchy data quality after the roll out of the WCCIS.
- Lack of complete coverage across all local authorities within the national datasets.
- The quality of data reporting may not be assessed.
- Inconsistent interpretation of data reporting guidance by local authorities, leading to inconsistent data.
- Inability to benchmark performance across different local authorities, or for individual authorities to compare themselves with others.
- Inability to compare with previous years, due to the changes in performance management reporting by local authorities.

What Welsh Government should do to improve quality

- Continue to monitor and influence the roll out of the WCCIS.
- Ensure that all local authorities can use the system and have the correct training to do so correctly.
- Explain to users how quality assurance is undertaken with local authorities.
- Publish a complete and accurate national dataset, as well as figures at the local authority level, where this has not already been the case.
- Explain all changes clearly to users, and highlight any areas where trend comparisons can potentially be made.

Next steps

- 3.1. We strongly encourage Welsh Government to work towards addressing the feedback we received from users as they continue to develop the statistics. Welsh Government has indicated that they hope to address the issues we have outlined largely through the forthcoming changes to the data to be collected. They acknowledge that while some of the issues will be addressed in the short-term, some may need to be tackled over a longer period of time. As a start, and until the new data collection is underway, they plan to incorporate expenditure data into the existing experimental statistics. This will enable users to draw greater insight from the current publications.
- 3.2. We will keep in touch with statisticians within Welsh Government to monitor their progress in resolving the issues affecting these statistics, and to offer advice and guidance where needed. We will continue to liaise with them over when it might be appropriate to remove the experimental statistics label from the publications, and to seek National Statistics designation where appropriate.
- 3.3. We will continue to engage with users and producers of social care statistics in Wales. We will speak further to users to understand the extent to which planned improvements to the statistics will meet their needs.
- 3.4. We will encourage and support producers and users to work together where appropriate to ensure that users' requirements are considered in any plans to improve the statistics.
- 3.5. If you have any comments on this report, or would like to contribute to this research, please contact regulation@statistics.gov.uk.



Our ambition is for adult social care statistics in Wales to develop to meet users' expectations

Annex 1: Organisations that contributed to this review

Over the course of the review we spoke to or received feedback from people in the organisations listed below.

Age Cymru

Carmarthenshire County Council

Data Cymru

Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council

Social Care Wales

Wales Audit Office

Welsh Local Government Association

Wrexham County Borough Council