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**Ed Humpherson | Director General for Regulation**

Dai Lloyd MS
Chair, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
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09 December 2020

Dear Mr Lloyd,

I write in response to the Health, Social Care and Sport Committee's call for evidence for the inquiry considering *the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak, and its management, on health and social care in Wales.*

The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) is the independent regulatory arm of the UK Statistics Authority. We provide independent regulation of all official statistics produced in the UK, including those in Devolved Nations and the NHS. Our regulatory work is underpinned by the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007.

We set the standards official statistics must meet through the statutory 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.

Statistics published by public sector bodies should be produced in a trustworthy way, be of high quality, and provide value by informing answers to society's important questions. As the regulator of official statistics in the UK, our view is that good quality data is the bedrock for developing statistics that serve the public good.

Reliable data and evidence are fundamental to underpin policy and decisions relating to the delivery of health and social care in Wales. Our interest in relation to this inquiry mainly revolves around how the pandemic has impacted on the provision of health and social care data, and how this in turn will affect services both now and in the future.

This submission outlines some of the challenges faced in Wales in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic that we can identify with from our own work:

- Data to support decisions related to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Impact of the pandemic on health;
- Impact of the pandemic on social care.

I look forward to seeing the conclusions of your inquiry. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

Your sincerely,

Ed Humpherson

## WELSH PARLIAMENT INQUIRY – THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 OUTBREAK, AND ITS MANAGEMENT, ON HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE IN WALES

**Data to support decisions related to the COVID-19 pandemic**

1. It is important that data related to both the COVID-19 pandemic and its management is available so that effective decisions can be made on how to manage the impact of the virus and lead Wales out of the pandemic.

2. Throughout the pandemic, OSR has continued to monitor the development of data relating to both the pandemic and its impact. We have intervened with departments across the UK where we have identified a need for improvements to the data and statistics they have produced.

3. In November, we published a statement[1] outlining the importance of sharing data in a way that promotes transparency and clarity. This outlined the importance of data that governments quote in statements and briefings being accessible to all and available in a timely manner.

4. Until recently, Welsh Government did not publish the slides and links to data sources to accompany their coronavirus briefings. Following our intervention, they have now started to make this information available on their website[2]. This is helpful in enabling those who are interested to understand the context and reasoning behind the Welsh Government's decisions.

5. Both Welsh Government and Public Health Wales have responded at speed and have developed new data collections[3] and rapid COVID-19 surveillance dashboards[4] to enable an understanding of the pandemic in Wales. In addition, Public Health Wales have published a paper examining risk factors for outbreaks of COVID-19 in care homes following hospital discharge[5].

6. Research of this nature is crucial to help understand the impact of practices early on in the pandemic and to inform future decisions. It is important to understand the strengths and limitations of such research. However, it is also important to be clear that much of the evidence is in its infancy and will continue to gain strength and weight as further evidence emerges. Whilst we welcome work of this nature to advance our understanding of the pandemic and its impacts, we also urge caution when basing decisions around future practice on early findings.

7. As the first vaccine to protect against COVID-19 is rolled-out, hopes are rising of there finally being a way out of the pandemic. It will be important that statistics are developed on the rollout of vaccination programmes and that these are used to inform and manage such programmes. We have detailed our expectations in a letter to producers of health-related statistics across the UK, published on 1st December[6]. Continued statistics on numbers of people infected with COVID-19 will, in part, help us to understand the efficacy of the vaccination programme.

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[1] https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/osr-statement-regarding-transparency-of-data-related-to-covid-19/
[2] https://gov.wales/slides-and-datasets-coronavirus-briefings
3 https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research?field_policy_areas%5B980%5D=980
4 https://public.tableau.com/profile/public.health.wales.health.protection#!/vizhome/RapidCOVID-19virology-Public/Headlinesummary
5 https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.08.24.20168955v1.full.pdf
6 https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/ed-humpherson-to-producers-of-health-related-statistics-across-the-uk-statistics-to-monitor-the-uks-covid-19-vaccination-programme/

## Impact of the pandemic on health

8. The early impacts of the pandemic in relation to such factors as delivery of cancer screening, mental health services and elective operations have been well documented. The longer-term impacts will be wide ranging and will only become fully apparent over the course of several years. These impacts will range across both physical and mental health and will also be influenced by factors such as wider social and economic determinants of health and behavioural risk factors, such as smoking, diet and alcohol consumption.

9. It will be important that comprehensive data is available to allow monitoring of this wide range of factors, both so that the broader impact of the pandemic is fully understood, and so that effective policy and practice can be put into place to address the negative impacts. Public Health England have developed a monitoring tool to assess the wider impacts of COVID-19 on health[7]. We recommend that a similar approach is adopted in Wales.

## Impact of the pandemic on social care

10. In 2018-19, we carried out a review of adult social care statistics across the UK[8]. Given the devolved nature of adult social care, the review looked at statistical issues in each of the four countries separately. Our research highlighted that adult social care has not been measured or managed as closely as healthcare, and a lack of funding has led to under investment and resourcing in data and analysis. Furthermore, the introduction of a new data collection system in recent years had led to variable levels of data quality within and across local authorities.

11. In 2019, the Welsh Government produced a new Social Services Activity publication[9]. The information within this release covered a range of areas related to local authority social services, and the statistics had a range of users including ministers within the National Assembly for Wales, local authorities, the Care Inspectorate Wales and Healthcare Inspectorate Wales, and charities.

12. In March 2020, Welsh Government data collections, research activity and outputs were reviewed in light of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The data collections which this statistical release is based on were suspended for 2019-20, meaning that there will be no updated publication for this reporting year.

13. Although it is currently planned that data collections will be resumed for the 2020-21 reporting year, it is likely that local authorities who provide the data will continue to be under significant pressure, meaning that the quality of the data they submit may be jeopardised. There also remains the risk that publication of key statistics will be delayed or further suspended while ever the pandemic continues.

**OFFICE FOR STATISTICS REGULATION, DECEMBER 2020**

[7] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wider-impacts-of-covid-19-on-health-monitoring-tool
[8] https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/systemic-review-outline-adult-social-care/
[9] https://gov.wales/social-services-activity-april-2018-march-2019