**Cross-Government Housing Statistics Group (CGHSG)**

**Action Plan – Part A: High Level Action**

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| **Systemic Review Findings** | | **CGHSG response** | **Proposed action** |
| 1. Coherence across official statistics publications could be improved including better sign-posting to navigate the landscape | | CGHSG acknowledged more could be done to provide an overarching narrative covering housing and planning statistics, however, there are difficulties in providing full coherence due to the differences in methods and definitions used across the devolved countries of the UK. A previous attempt at providing an overarching narrative[[1]](#footnote-1) was produced in 2014 but proved difficult to complete. However, this article does provide a helpful framework to consider for updated analysis in future, particularly if a thematic approach is adopted.  Housing and related planning statistics has a wide scope and as such CGHSG will approach delivering progress against the systemic review on a thematic basis. The first theme to be considered will be the private rented sector.  A large amount of documentation covering housing definitions are available, separately within each country. However, these definitions need better sign-posting, and where possible, central collation in a user guide. Again, this will be taken forward on a thematic basis, starting with the private rented sector. | **Each member of CGHSG will immediately** ensure statistical releases are placed in context of other similar measures (if not already done so) and review any accompanying metadata for up-to-date definitions.  CGHSG will consider the systemic review findings on a thematic basis, with the private rented sector first. Within the next 12 months, **ONS will lead** on the publication of an overarching private rented sector article that provides users with a better understanding of the availability and comparability of statistics, along with any development work taking place.  As work on the private rented sector progresses, the CGHSG will consider the next housing theme for review. |
| **Users seeking an overarching narrative on key issues and the value of housing and planning statistics would be improved by:**   * Explaining the extent of comparability of different statistics available and clear signposting between related sources * Being clear which statistics are best suited to answer different questions * Developing thematic or topic-specific analyses to help answer key questions – potentially drawing on a wider pool of evidence | Illustrative examples:   * The majority of outputs are based on single data collections rather than drawing together a range of data sources to add insight thematically. * In England and in Northern Ireland different house building measures cause user confusion * Users find it difficult to access a coherent picture on affordable housing across the UK |
| 2. Accessibility of official statistics could be improved to help users to access the information they seek and permit Government to maximise the value of data they hold | |  | |
| There is a wealth of official housing and planning statistics produced by many government departments and agencies across the UK which are accessed through different websites and portals. As a result, users can find it difficult to locate and access those data and microdata most relevant to their needs.  **Accessibility constraints are a barrier to the system providing the best public value. Statistics, data and associated metadata should be published at the lowest level of detail while maintaining confidentiality and quality. This matters because housing and planning are very localised subjects. Statistics producers should provide straightforward and open ways of accessing their statistics, data, and related guidance – recognising the needs of different types of users.** | Illustrative examples:   * Users (particularly in England) find it difficult to find what they are looking for with multiple producers and no single entry point * DCLG does not routinely publish regional statistics; users have to combine data themselves to get a regional figure | One of the issues with the publication of housing and planning statistics is the sheer amount of information that is produced to meet user needs. Ensuring this is available via a single point of entry is likely to be difficult and expensive to maintain. However, a useful resource was produced during the 2012 National Statistician’s review of housing market statistics (annex C)[[2]](#footnote-2) which set out the availability of all housing market statistics. This annex will provide a useful starting point on which to build.  The newly launched UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE) provides an opportunity for CGHSG to identify options for working together to improve the accessibility of housing statistics. | **CGHSG will review** annex C of the 2012 National Statistician’s review of official housing market statistics and update accordingly. The annex will be created and published in a standalone format to better support users by end Summer 2018.  **CGHSG will continue to engage** with CaCHE to understand how both groups can work together to improve the access to official housing statistics (CaCHE representatives attended CGHSG meeting in early 2018). |
| 3. Gaps in official statistics should be addressed to help answer key questions | |  | |
| Existing official statistics cover a broad range of topics under the wider theme of housing and planning, but there have been few examples of innovations in response to the changing housing and demographic landscape. Many users have highlighted key gaps in official statistics and as a result it is difficult for them to answer important questions and understand drivers and trends.  **Addressing these gaps, including maximising use of existing data and continuing to develop statistics products in a coherent fashion across the Government Statistical Service and UK countries to respond to user needs is a key way to improve the public value of housing and planning statistics.** | Illustrative examples of gaps in insight across the UK:   * Private rental market * Planning including transparency around planning permissions * Land ownership and land use * Understanding the link between housing and other topics | There was a feeling that this finding was slightly at odds with the perception from users CGHSG speak with. However, given this has been raised in the report, and particularly as OSR have mentioned the private rented sector as a priority, CGHSG will act on this feedback.  It was agreed that the housing sector is too wide in scope to consider as one, therefore a thematic approach to addressing this finding will be taken, focusing on the private rented sector initially. As progress is made with this first theme, the group will then consider the next theme to take forward. | CGHSG will prioritise the private rented sector, with ONS to take the lead given the developments already taking place with private rental price statistics.  **CGHSG will consider any** current and potential private rental sector developments, which attempts to address the gaps and difficulties raised in the OSR report.  **By late 2018, ONS will produce an overarching UK private rental sector article**, that brings together all current data sources and developments to provide users with a coherent picture of the sector, including what developments may take place to address user requirements. |
| 4. Transparency of official statistics could be increased through improved information about statistical definitions, methods, and strengths and limitations of official statistics | |  | |
| Presenting transparent information about statistical definitions and methods, together with judgements about strengths and limitations, is essential in supporting users’ confidence in statistics. Some elements of housing are highly politicised and attract wide user attention**. Around these areas in particular statistics producers could improve the value of their statistics by being clearer on what is measured, the extent to which it is comparable with related statistics, and the limitations of the statistics.** | Illustrative examples:   * Definitions of Homelessness across the UK differ due to devolved policy, and information about the extent of comparability is generally limited * Affordability of housing and different types of ‘affordable housing’ are key concepts but definitions across the UK vary due to devolved policy and there is a lack of clarity on appropriate comparisons across sources | CGHSG felt there is already a lot of publicly available information in place but acknowledged this needs to be reviewed and brought together with better signposting. Ideally a guide would be produced for the housing sector, but the production of a cross-government guide can prove problematic.  A thematic approach should also be taken to addressing this finding, and the publication of the private rental sector article (see finding 3) should include a suitable list of definitions, limitations etc. | **Each member of CGHSG will immediately** ensure statistical releases are placed in context of other similar measures and review any accompanying metadata for up-to-date definitions.  **By late 2018, ONS will produce an overarching UK private rental sector article**, that brings together all current data sources and developments to provide users with a coherent picture of the sector. |
| 5. Quality of key official statistics data sources could be improved | |  | |
| The majority of statistics on housing and planning are based on data collected through local authorities providing services within their community. The quality of official statistics is therefore dependent on the robustness of data collection practices and adequate quality assurances at different stages of the statistical production process.  **In 2015 we introduced a new Regulatory Standard on the Quality Assurance of Administrative Data[[3]](#footnote-3) and we expect to see clearer demonstration of how this has been applied across a range of housing statistics to assure users about the quality of these statistics.** | Illustrative examples:   * A mixed picture about the extent to which official statistics outputs publicly demonstrate appropriate quality assurances of the data and statistics * There is a widespread view that quarterly statistics on house building in England and Wales undercount the number of houses built | CGHSG acknowledged the need to strengthen the quality of, and trust in official housing statistics. The use of the regulatory standard on the Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) has already been embraced across several statistical outputs and will continue to be. However, CGHSG also felt the use of QAADs need to be proportional and reflect the relevant importance of an output and the resources available. | **All members of CGHSG to consider** the application of new QAAD standard to official statistics on housing and planning, where applicable.  Where QAAD documentation already exists, CGHSG to ensure this information is clearly signposted for users. |
| 6. Strengthened collaboration and strategic coordination between government departments could make the statistical system more effective | |  | |
| While housing and planning are devolved matters across the UK, the key questions of societal interest are often the same**.**  **Joint cross-producer working has the scope to permit efficient use of resources with information shared and statistical development work prioritised and coordinated. This would help enable the improvements to statistical outputs highlighted above.** | Illustrative examples:   * Limited strategic cross-producer engagement and strategic collaboration, beyond ad-hoc engagement or engagement relating to individual statistics publications and surveys | CGHSG acknowledged that collaboration and strategic coordination could be strengthened, but have already started taking steps to address this finding by setting up the Group.  It was agreed CGHSG should look to engage with CaCHE to consider any opportunities/options for working together to improve the accessibility of housing statistics. | CGHSG initiated which provides a direct response to this finding. The CGHSG terms of reference and workplan will be published (once finalised) and regularly updated to reflect progress and priorities. |
| 7. The statistical system should engage more effectively with a wider range of stakeholders who are recognised as being at the heart of increasing the public value of official statistics | |  | |
| We heard lots of suggestions for improvements in housing and planning statistics from users and it was evident that there is currently limited opportunity for a wider range of stakeholders (beyond policy officials) to engage effectively with the statistical system about their needs.  **Effective user engagement is necessary for producers to develop and maintain a current understanding of the value and potential value of their statistics and inform priorities and development plans for data collections and statistical outputs. Such engagement should be supported to ensure that statistics are accessible, remain relevant and benefit society – helping to answer key questions of the day.** | Illustrative examples:   * Limited user engagement mechanisms across the four countries * Some good examples of user engagement mechanisms in Wales and Scotland that others could learn from | CGHSG felt there are already many good examples of user engagement that are not reflected in OSR review, but will consider what more can be done to either signpost current engagement mechanisms or to improve.  It was again agreed that engagement should be considered on thematic approach, particularly if CGHSG considers an annual user event. | **All members of CGHSG to consider** the best approach to signpost the various avenues of engagement available to users so they become more publicly available, potentially as part of the review/update of Annex C of the National Statistician’s review of housing market statistics (see finding 2).  CGHSG to consider an annual thematic user event – with the first one to focus on the private rental sector. |

**Action Plan – Part B: Departmental action plan covering specific issues raised in report:**

**A. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHLG)**

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| A1. MHCLG to thoroughly explain the terms and definitions used in the production of statistics on affordable housing, including guidance on comparability (para. 3.6). |
| **A1 Response & proposed action:**  MHCLG isto review and update the guidance in the statistical release with guidance on comparability in the November 2018 publication |
| A2. MHCLG to confirm if their housing statistics include affordable housing in their coverage, and if so, whether these measures are comparable with those presented in the affordable housing publications (para 3.6). |
| **A2 Response & proposed action:**  MHCLG is to review and update the guidance on this across all related statistical releases (Affordable Housing Statistics, Net Additional Dwellings, and New Build Housing) so that it is clearer to users how these figures relate to each other and which sources are most suitable. |
| A3. MHCLG to provide further clarification on the respective merits of using annual or quarterly housing statistics explaining the coverage of its quarterly New Build Dwelling statistics and how they relate to the annual Net Additional Dwelling figures. This should include helpful explanations about how the different sources relate to each other and consideration of any improvements that would be possible. (para 3.33, 3.6 and 3.8 ). |
| **A3 Response & proposed action:**  Further clarification on this and other issues will be included in future statistical releases. Alongside the June publication of the House building: new build dwellings release an action plan outlining future improvements was published <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-the-measurement-of-new-homes-built-action-plan>. Improvements to the statistics and presentation will then be made incrementally in future releases following input from users. |
| A4. MHCLG to consider options to further publicise the English Housing Survey to users (para 3.18). |
| **A4 Response & proposed action:**  The English Housing Survey is widely publicised to survey users.  For example, to mark the 50th anniversary of the EHS, MHCLG:   * Produced and published [a report](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/50-years-of-the-english-housing-survey) on how housing and the English Housing Survey has changed over the last 50 year (November 2017). * Organised and hosted a special event to launch the report (programme attached), well attended by government officials, academics, and housing experts (November 2017). * Presented, alongside housing survey colleagues from Wales, NI and Scotland, at an [event hosted by BRE](https://www.bre.co.uk/eventdetails.jsp?id=15432) on 50 years of UK housing surveys (October 2017) * We have also had a paper accepted to present at the [Royal Statistical Society Annual Conference](https://events.rss.org.uk/rss/frontend/reg/tAgendaWebsite.csp?pageID=59058&daySelector=4&eventID=194) (in September 2018), again with colleagues from Wales, NI and Scotland, on 50 years of UK housing surveys.   In January 2018, we published the annual EHS headline report and work is well underway for the publication of seven detailed topic reports in July 2018. The content of these reports was signed off by our user group following consultation with survey users in MHCLG, BEIS and the Home Office. Alongside these topic reports, we will also publish the EHS technical report, and a series of methodology papers summarising work we have done recently to improve the EHS (e.g. the findings from an incentive experiment run for us by NatCen to increase the EHS response rate, cognitive testing to improve the leasehold questions).  We make EHS data publicly available via the UK Data Service.  For the first time in a number of years, there were housing surveys in England, Wales, NI and Scotland in 2017. Work will commence shortly on jointly producing a UK Housing Report. |
| A5. MHCLG to provide further clarification regarding any potential double counting in planning permissions statistics (para 3.20). |
| **A5 Response & proposed action:**  The Planning Application National Statistics, as collected and published by the department each quarter, record the administrative decisions of local planning authorities, including numbers of applications granted, without information being collected on the numbers of homes included within those applications that are for residential developments.  Since 2014, the department has supplemented this information by routinely publishing national figures for the numbers of housing units granted permission during in the latest year, as provided by a private contractor. The contractor obtains these figures from individual local planning authorities through a combination of web-scraping and detailed queries with individual authorities, with the definitions used having undergone detailed review and scrutiny by the department’s analysts in conjunction with other users. The current definition used is described in detail within the Definitions section of the department’s quarterly statistical release (such as on page 26 of the latest release, at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/planning-applications-in-england-october-to-december-2017>). Among other things, this states:  “To avoid double counting, units on residential development sites with planning permission are excluded where the residential development site has already received a planning permission within the previous twelve months.  Only the units from the most recent planning permission are included. Where multiple planning permissions are given to a residential development site in the same quarter, only the most recent planning permission is included for the purpose of counting units with permission “  It is possible that this approach includes some double counting of permissions, including those granted for the same site more than twelve months earlier. As part of its ongoing dialogue with the current contractor, analysts will explore whether the data collected are reliable enough for the methodology could be developed further, to remove any remaining double counting. This is approach is more likely to be more cost-effective than central government seeking to acquire the necessary planning data direct from individual local planning authorities, which would involve a large increase in the reporting burden placed upon them, unless a similar approach to that already used by the private contractor, could be developed. |

**B.** **Department for Communities, Northern Ireland (DCNI)**

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| B1. DCNI to provide additional guidance on the two different measures of social housing dwelling starts and completions, providing helpful explanations about how different sources relate to one another (para 3.8). |
| **B1 Response & proposed action:**  The Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin and The Northern Ireland Housing Statistics publications report on two different measures of social housing dwelling starts and completions: those provided by Building Control; and those provided by the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP). These figures often differ from each other, but this is not due to error or different units being recorded by each. The same social housing units are recorded by both data providers, the difference lies in their recording criteria – each record a unit as a ‘start’ or ‘completion’ at different points during the planning and building process.  For example, SHDP may record an official start on-site in March, but Building Control may not record it until an inspection has been carried out, which could be in April.  We have now included an explanation in the Annex of our publications explaining this difference to users, as well as signposting this explanation in the main summary document for the publications. |

**C. Office for National Statistics (ONS)**

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| C1. ONS to publish information about the robustness of assumptions in their proposed method for producing household projections for England, and their accuracy (para 3.28). |
| **C1 Response & proposed action:**  ONS will publish information to help users understand what assumptions have been made in the proposed method for producing Household Projections for England and the rationale for the assumptions. ONS will also publish information to help users assess the accuracy of the Household Projections for England. Some information will be published as part of a research update on the proposed methodology, with full guidance provided as part of the release, which is provisionally scheduled for September 2018. |
| C2. ONS to present a clear demonstration of how any changes to household projections methodology address the limitations of previous methodology (para 3.28). |
| **C2 Response & proposed action:**  ONS will provide guidance to users about how changes to the household projections methodology address limitations of the previous methodology. Some information will be published as part of a research update on the proposed methodology, with full guidance provided as part of the release, which is provisionally scheduled for September 2018. |

1. http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20160109144125/http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171766\_373513.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/images-nationalstatisticiansreviewofofficialhousingmarketstatistic\_tcm97-42119.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/osr/monitoring/administrative-data-and-official-statistics/ [↑](#footnote-ref-3)