

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Housing and Benefits in Northern Ireland

*(produced by the Department for Social
Development Northern Ireland)*

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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 sets of statistics produced by the Department for Social Development Northern Ireland (DSD):

- *Northern Ireland Housing Statistics*⁴ (*Annual Housing*); and
- *Northern Ireland Benefits Statistics Summary*⁵ (*Benefits Statistics*).

1.1.2 The Act also allows the appropriate authority to request an assessment of other official statistics in order for them to gain National Statistics status. This report is in response to such a request in relation to statistics published in *Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin*⁶ (*Quarterly Housing*).

1.1.3 Section 3 of this report adopts an ‘exception reporting’ approach – it includes text only to support the Requirements made to strengthen compliance with the *Code* and Suggestions made to improve confidence in the production, management and dissemination of these statistics. This abbreviated style of report reflects the Head of Assessment’s consideration of aspects of risk and materiality⁷. The Assessment team nonetheless assessed compliance with all parts of the *Code of Practice* and has commented on all those in respect of which some remedial action is recommended.

1.1.4 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 products listed at 1.1.1 above can be designated as National Statistics and has determined that the product detailed in paragraph 1.1.2 above can be designated as a new National Statistics product, subject to DSD implementing the enhancements listed in

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://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/stats_and_research/stats-publications/stats-housing-publications/housing_stats.htm

⁵ http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/stats_and_research/benefit_publications.htm

⁶ http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/stats_and_research/stats-publications/stats-housing-publications/housing_bulletins.htm

⁷ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/guidance-about-assessment/criteria-for-deciding-upon-the-format-of-an-assessment-report.pdf>

section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by July 2012 for Requirement 8 and by October 2012 for Requirements 1 to 7.

1.2.2 DSD has informed the Assessment team that it has started to implement the Requirements listed in section 1.5. The Statistics Authority welcomes this.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 DSD has published housing statistics for 12 years and they provide valuable information about housing-related topics in Northern Ireland. There is a need for closer engagement between DSD's housing statistics team and the main users of the housing statistics. The housing reports provide insufficient contextual information about the statistics and insufficient explanation and commentary to accompany the statistics presented in tables. An internal DSD review of the housing reports identified ways in which these reports could be improved, although the recommendations have yet to be implemented.

1.3.2 The housing and benefits reports provide little information about how quality is monitored and assured and about comparability within the UK. The benefits report provides little commentary and there is scope to enhance the presentation of the statistics in the graphs, tables and maps.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that DSD 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 | (a) Investigate and document the needs of users of <i>Northern Ireland Housing Statistics</i> and <i>Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin</i> ; and
(b) Gather and publish information about users' experiences of the statistical service (para 3.2). |
| Requirement 2 | Publish additional information in <i>Northern Ireland Housing Statistics</i> and <i>Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin</i> about the data sources, classifications and methods used to produce the statistics and provide links to where more detailed information can be found (para 3.3). |
| Requirement 3 | Provide more information about the quality of the housing statistics and about the arrangements for quality assuring the data (para 3.4). |

- Requirement 4** Improve, and make more accessible, information about the quality of the benefits statistics (para 3.5).
- Requirement 5** Publish annually the estimated costs to suppliers of providing the information needed to produce *Northern Ireland Housing Statistics* and *Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin* (para 3.8).
- Requirement 6** Confirm that sufficient resources will be made available to allow these statistics to be produced to the standards of the Code (para 3.9).
- Requirement 7** (a) Improve the presentation of the statistics in *Northern Ireland Housing Statistics*, *Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin* and *Northern Ireland Benefits Statistics Summary* and the accompanying commentary and contextual information, to aid user interpretation; and
(b) Investigate options for improving the quality of the graphs, charts and maps published in *Northern Ireland Benefits Statistics Summary* (para 3.10).
- Requirement 8** Ensure that access to these statistics (prior to the statutory period allowed for) is restricted to people essential for their production and publication (para 3.12).

2 Subject of the assessment

Northern Ireland Housing Reports

- 2.1 *Northern Ireland Housing Statistics (Annual Housing)* presents statistics on a wide range of housing-related topics including housing stock statistics, planning applications, new housing starts and completions, and information about the Northern Ireland Housing Executive⁸ (NIHE). The main data sources for these statistics are DSD's administrative systems⁹ and NIHE. DSD's administrative systems include data about public expenditure on housing and grants awarded under schemes such as the Warm Homes Scheme¹⁰ and Housing Association Grants¹¹. NIHE provides data about a range of topics including the public housing stock, housing conditions, and housing improvements. *Annual Housing* is published in November, approximately eight months after the financial year to which the statistics relate.
- 2.2 *Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin (Quarterly Housing)* presents statistics on new house sales and prices, mortgage possessions, homelessness, and new housing starts and completions. It is published four months after the end of the quarter being reported upon.
- 2.3 The housing statistics are used by DSD to develop, monitor and evaluate its policies on private rented housing¹², fuel poverty¹³ and homelessness¹⁴. The reports present statistics that are used to measure progress towards some commitments made in the Northern Ireland Executive's *Programme for Government 2011-15*¹⁵. The reports present information used by the Industry Training Board and Sector Skills Council¹⁶ to publish a range of performance indicators for the construction industry in Northern Ireland¹⁷. The statistics are also used by researchers and analysts, for example to assist in the production of a labour market intelligence report¹⁸.

Northern Ireland Benefits Report

- 2.4 *Northern Ireland Benefits Statistics Summary (Benefits Statistics)* presents statistics on the main benefits administered in Northern Ireland by the Northern Ireland Social Security Agency¹⁹, including Jobseeker's Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Pension Credit, State Pension and Disability Living Allowance. DSD also publishes a large

⁸ <http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/about.htm>

⁹ <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/hdiv-housing.htm>

¹⁰ <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/publications/news-feature/features-archive/feature-warm-homes.htm>

¹¹ http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/hdiv-housing/ha_guide/hag-guide-contents-pg/hag.pt6/hag.pt6.app2#ha_grant

¹² http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/hdiv-housing/private_rented_sector/private_rented_sector_strategy.htm

¹³ http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/hdiv-housing/fuel_poverty.htm

¹⁴ http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/corporate/strategies/homelessness_strategy.htm

¹⁵ <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/work-of-the-executive/pfg.htm>

¹⁶ CITB-Construction Skills Northern Ireland, <http://www.citbcsn.org.uk/Home>

¹⁷ <http://www.citbni.org.uk/getattachment/a9baec42-7118-42a6-80e7-ac38908861d1/.aspx>

¹⁸ <http://www.cskills.org/sectorskills/csn/csnoutputs/outputsni.aspx>

¹⁹ <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/ssa.htm>

number of tables alongside *Benefits Statistics* which provide more detailed information, including breakdowns of the number of claimants by age, sex and geographical area.

- 2.5 *Benefits Statistics* was first published in January 2012. It replaced eight separate reports on individual benefits and two summary reports. The statistics are now based on information on all benefit cases, which has been extracted from the benefit administrative systems. The statistics in the previous releases were based on samples of cases. As a result, the statistics are now more accurate and are not subject to sampling error. The new data source mirrors that used by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and so the statistics are now more directly comparable with those published for GB. *Benefits Statistics* is published quarterly and is available approximately four months after the date of extract compared with a lag of approximately nine months previously.
- 2.6 DSD uses benefits statistics to model options for welfare reform and to forecast public expenditure on benefits. The statistics are used by the Northern Ireland Social Security Agency to review different delivery options, and the Northern Ireland Department for Employment and Learning to examine the implications of welfare reform for its policies and programmes. Local councils use the statistics to inform their engagement with community groups.

3 Assessment findings

- 3.1 In May 2011, a policy and research team from within DSD's Housing Division reported on a review of the provision of housing statistics for Northern Ireland. The report from the housing statistics review (the review) identified the need for closer engagement between DSD's housing statistics team and the main users of the statistics. The review made recommendations aimed at improving user engagement and the usefulness of the published statistics. It included a recommendation for the producer team to carry out a survey of users to gather information about the uses they make of the statistics and of their experience of the statistical service. The statistics team told us that it has yet to address the recommendations in the report.
- 3.2 Based on the Assessment team's research, we endorse these recommendations. DSD told us that it meets users of these statistics within DSD on a regular basis but has less engagement with other users. DSD intends to establish two new user groups, for housing and for benefits statistics, although these plans are at an early stage of development. DSD has published little information about the uses of these statistics. DSD plans to carry out a survey of the users of these statistics to gather information about their needs and experiences of the statistical service. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DSD should (a) investigate and document the needs of users of these statistics; and (b) gather and publish information about users' experiences of the statistical service²⁰ (Requirement 1). In meeting this Requirement we suggest that DSD refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority's Monitoring Brief, *The Use Made of Official Statistics*²¹ when documenting use. We further suggest that DSD publish the 2011 housing statistics review report along with information about how it plans to respond to the recommendations in the review.
- 3.3 DSD publishes little information in the housing reports about the data sources, the classifications adopted and the methods used to produce the housing statistics. The reports provide some links to where further information can be found but they do not do this systematically. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DSD should publish additional information in the housing reports about the data sources, classifications and methods used to produce the statistics and provide links to where more detailed information can be found²² (Requirement 2).
- 3.4 *Annual Housing* states that the quality of the administrative source data used to compile the statistics is 'very good' and 'robust' but does not provide further information to support these statements. It mentions that some of the data have been quality assured but does not provide any details or links to where further information can be found. *Quarterly Housing* states that DSD attempts to assure the quality of the data but is not responsible for its quality. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DSD should provide more information about

²⁰ In relation to Principle 1, Practices 2 and 5 of the *Code of Practice*

²¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>

²² In relation to Principle 4, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

the quality of the housing statistics and about the arrangements for quality assuring the data²³ (Requirement 3).

- 3.5 DSD's website provides access to previous versions of the benefits statistics releases in a benefits publication archive²⁴. The archive includes background documents that provide more detailed information about each of the main benefits. These include a summary of the main features of each benefit, information about how the data are collected and processed, about the quality of the statistics, and a glossary of terms used. *Benefits Statistics* provides little such information. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DSD should improve, and make more accessible, information about the quality of the benefits statistics²⁵ (Requirement 4).
- 3.6 *Annual Housing* provides links to where information can be found about housing statistics in the other administrations of the UK and in the Republic of Ireland. It does not discuss the extent to which comparable statistics are available for these countries. The report presents some comparisons between rent levels in England, Wales and Scotland, but not for the other housing statistics that are presented. We suggest that DSD provide more information about the availability of comparable housing statistics for England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland.
- 3.7 DSD uses the same data source as that used by DWP to produce benefits statistics for GB. DSD consulted benefits statistics users in September 2011 about planned changes to the statistics and indicated that the new data source would facilitate much improved comparative analysis with other regions of the United Kingdom. *Benefits Statistics* provides a link to information about the benefits statistics for GB but does not present comparisons with GB or other regions of the UK. We suggest that DSD work with DWP to provide comparisons and analysis of benefits statistics in Northern Ireland and in GB that will aid user interpretation.
- 3.8 DSD does not collect information on the estimated costs to suppliers of providing the information needed to produce the housing reports. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DSD should publish annually the estimated costs to suppliers of providing the information needed to produce *Northern Ireland Housing Statistics* and *Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin*²⁶ (Requirement 5).
- 3.9 DSD told us that its Housing team deployed 1.35 full time equivalent staff to produce and publish the housing reports and estimates that 0.4 full time equivalent staff are assigned to the production and publication of the benefits report. Both teams have other analytical responsibilities above and beyond the production and dissemination of these statistics. DSD statisticians told us that there had been some staff resource constraints and that they had sought more staff. It is not clear to the Assessment team whether the current resources are

²³ In relation to Principle 4, Practices 2 and 3 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁴ http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/stats_and_research/benefit_publications/benefit_publications_archive.htm

²⁵ In relation to Principle 4, Practices 1 and 2 and Principle 8, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁶ In relation to Principle 6, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

sufficient to address the Requirements identified in this report. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DSD should confirm that sufficient resources will be made available to allow these statistics to be produced to the standards of the Code²⁷ (Requirement 6).

- 3.10 *Benefits Statistics* provides a short introduction but no summary of the key points. *Annual Housing* and *Quarterly Housing* both provide short introductions and key points sections at the beginning of the reports. These reports provide insufficient contextual information about the statistics; insufficient explanation of the statistics; and insufficient commentary to accompany the statistics presented in tables. The review (see para 3.1) identified some ways in which these reports could be improved, including the need for more narrative to introduce subjects, more explanation of individual tables and more analysis of trends over time. The review also suggested that the statistics team consider how the equivalent statistics are presented for the other administrations of the UK. The Assessment team endorses these recommendations. DSD's consultation document about the planned changes to the benefits statistics (see para 3.7) previously indicated that the new publication would make better use of graphs, charts and maps through the use of more advanced software. DSD told us that the new software imposes constraints on the type of graphics that can be produced. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DSD should (a) improve the presentation of *Northern Ireland Housing Statistics*, *Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin* and *Northern Ireland Benefits Statistics Summary* and the accompanying commentary and contextual information, to aid user interpretation²⁸; and (b) investigate options for improving the quality of the graphs, charts and maps published in *Benefits Statistics*²⁹ (Requirement 7). We suggest that DSD consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve the housing and benefits reports. We further suggest that DSD take account when reviewing ways of improving the presentation of the housing statistics of how equivalent statistics are presented for other parts of the UK.
- 3.11 *Benefits Statistics* does not include the name of the responsible statistician. DSD has confirmed that it will include contact names as well as contact details in all future releases.
- 3.12 The senior statistician in DSD provides briefing about the latest statistics to the Social Development Minister and to a small number of officials 24 hours before the public release of the statistics, in accordance with the *Northern Ireland Pre-Release to Official Statistics Order*³⁰. When the senior statistician is not available, a senior official who is not part of the statistical production process takes responsibility for approving this briefing material, and has access to the statistics prior to the 24 hours provided for in the Order. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DSD should ensure that access to these statistics (prior to the statutory period allowed for) is restricted to people essential for their production and publication³¹ (Requirement 8).

²⁷ In relation to Principle 7, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁸ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁹ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

³⁰ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2009/71/contents/made>

³¹ In relation to Protocol 2, Practice 7 of the *Code of Practice*

3.13 DSD has published a Statement of Administrative Sources³², although it contains references to statistics which are no longer published. DSD has confirmed that it will update its Statement and publish a revised version.

³² http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/stats_and_research/about-national-statistics-protocols-compliance.htm

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to DSD's housing and benefits statistics 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.

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| Suggestion 1 | Refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority's Monitoring Brief, <i>The Use Made of Official Statistics</i> when documenting use (para 3.2). |
| Suggestion 2 | Publish the 2011 housing statistics review report along with information about how DSD plans to respond to the recommendations in the review (para 3.2). |
| Suggestion 3 | Provide more information about the availability of comparable housing statistics for England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland (para 3.6). |
| Suggestion 4 | Work with DWP to provide comparisons and analysis of benefits statistics in Northern Ireland and in Great Britain that will aid user interpretation (para 3.7). |
| Suggestion 5 | Consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve the statistical releases (para 3.10). |
| Suggestion 6 | Take account when reviewing ways of improving the presentation of <i>Northern Ireland Housing Statistics and Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin</i> of how equivalent statistics are presented for other parts of the UK (para 3.10). |

Annex 2: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Releases

- A2.1 In October 2010, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Releases*³³. While 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 housing and benefits reports, 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 All the reports adequately describe the coverage of the statistics and the periods to which the latest statistics refer. Standard headings are used and the logo for a National Statistics report is displayed when appropriate. A publication schedule³⁴ for all the reports for the following twelve months is available on DSD's website; each report details the date of the next release.
- A2.4 All the reports include short introductions with more information provided in 'Background Notes' in appendices. *Annual Housing* contains a contents section at the beginning. *Benefits Statistics* does not include the name of the responsible statistician.

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

- A2.5 Both *Annual Housing* and *Quarterly Housing* have short summary findings sections at the start. *Benefits Statistics* neither contains a contents nor a summary findings section.
- A2.6 Commentary in the reports largely describes rises and falls over the period or longer time series analyses, such as comparisons with the same quarter in the previous year and comparisons between the highest and lowest Local Government District for a range of statistics. No commentary is provided about many of the tables. For example, *Annual Housing* presents different statistics about rent levels in different places within the report, but provides no accompanying commentary on rents and does not provide any explanation about how the different statistics should be interpreted. There is some description of trends in the Housing reports. The reports contain insufficient information about the wider context for both the housing and benefits reports.
- A2.7 *Annual Housing* contains some text in the General Notes section referring to statistics as not being National Statistics or as being Official Statistics not National Statistics. The report does not provide any guidance on the

³³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-releases.html>

³⁴ http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/stats_and_research/about-national-statistics-protocols-compliance.htm

relationship between National Statistics and Official Statistics and individual tables based on non-Official Statistics sources are not labelled as such.

A2.8 Graphs, tables and occasionally maps are used to illustrate trends or comparisons across Northern Ireland. Tables in the Housing reports occasionally include columns of data with zero returns without explanation. Two separate indices of new house prices from different sources are presented in *Quarterly Housing* with no information for users about the differences between them or guidance on which to use for different purposes. Section titles are not consistently good descriptors of the statistics presented. An example is in *Quarterly Housing* where the title is 'Mortgage Statistics' which focuses on statistics about the repossession of mortgages. The presentational order of the statistics in the Housing reports sometimes results in statistics which are logically related not necessarily being contiguous. For example, *Quarterly Housing* includes a section on homelessness in between sections on housing starts and housing completions. *Benefits Statistics* presents graphs where the scales used impede easy comparison e.g. a number of lines are presented very close together. Some of the figures contained in *Benefits Statistics* have no title or number. Some graphs present statistics for 'claimants' and others for 'recipients' with no information about the reasons for making the distinction.

A2.9 The layout of the housing reports could be more helpful to users and information presented in other formats apart from lengthy tables.

Use language that is impartial, objective and professionally sound

A2.10 The text used in the reports is impartial and evidence based. The descriptions of proportions, changes and trends in the releases are appropriate. In *Quarterly Housing* however many of the time series are too short to identify trends. Sampling and non-sampling variability are discussed in *Annual Housing* where data are sourced from surveys.

Include information about the context and likely uses

A2.11 Commentary in *Annual Housing* provides brief operational and strategic context to the statistics. *Quarterly Housing* and *Benefits Statistics* make no references to the policy or operational contexts or cross-refer to where such information may be found.

Include, or link to, appropriate metadata

A2.12 Information about data sources and definitions are included in the housing reports within 'General Notes' or 'Data Sources' sections. In *Quarterly Housing* sources of data are not always given. *Benefits Statistics* refers to the source of the data but provides little information about the quality and reliability of the statistics.

A2.13 Comparisons with GB figures in *Annual Housing* are confined to average rent statistics. In *Benefits Statistics* there is no comparative analysis with GB or other individual regions of the UK.

Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views

- A3.1 This assessment was conducted from September 2011 to March 2012.
- A3.2 The Assessment team – Neil Jackson and Iain Russell – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of DSD in December. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 13 February (housing reports) and 29 February (benefits report). The Assessment team subsequently met DSD during March 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 14 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:
- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| DSD | 2 |
| Government / UK Parliament | 2 |
| Private sector / academic | 2 |
| Public | 2 |
| Data suppliers | 6 |
- A3.5 Both housing and benefits reports were perceived by some users as being comprehensive, meeting their needs, easily referenced, clearly laid out, and showing a lot of detail. The availability of local data and the coherence of benefits statistics with those from DWP were cited as being particularly useful. The DSD statistics team was reported as being responsive and helpful.
- A3.6 Most data suppliers reported that guidance on supply of data from DSD was easy to understand and implement. A supplier of specific housing statistics data however commented that guidance might be clearer. Some users of the housing statistics wanted the release of these statistics to be more timely. Concerns raised by housing reports users included uncertainty about the definitions of some classifications, a lack of coherence between specific statistics and those from other sources and a lack of explanation behind the data. Comments made by an internal user about these statistics queried the relevance of some of the statistics as well as the presentation of, and commentary related to, these statistics.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

