

# Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

## Statistics on English Local Authority Capital Expenditure and Receipts, and Revenue Expenditure and Financing

*(produced by the Department for  
Communities and Local 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 of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics**

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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 reports<sup>1</sup> prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*<sup>2</sup>. The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*<sup>3</sup>. The report covers statistics on *Local authority capital expenditure and receipts*, and *Local authority revenue expenditure and financing* produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) reported in:

- *Local authority capital expenditure and receipts – England – provisional outturn and forecast*<sup>4</sup>;
- *Local authority capital expenditure and receipts – England – 2<sup>nd</sup> provisional outturn*<sup>5</sup>;
- *Local authority capital expenditure and receipts – England – final outturn*<sup>6</sup>;
- *Local authority revenue expenditure and financing England – Budget*<sup>7</sup>;
- *Local authority revenue expenditure and financing England – provisional outturn*<sup>8</sup>; and
- *Local authority revenue expenditure and financing England – final outturn*<sup>9</sup>.

1.1.2 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 outputs listed in paragraph 1.1.1 are designated as National Statistics, subject to DCLG implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by July 2011.

## 1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 DCLG engages with central and local government users via regular meetings with an established user group. However, the discussions and information shared in these meetings could be disseminated more effectively.

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

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga\\_20070018\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf)

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

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/capital201010forecast>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/capital200910provoutturn2>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/capital200910finaloutturn>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/revenue201011budget>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/revenue200910provoutturn>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/revenue200910finaloutturn>

1.3.2 The statistics are based on data provided by English local authorities (LAs) in financial returns submitted to DCLG. DCLG carries out extensive quality assurance to ensure that the data are reliable. DCLG provides some information about the quality and reliability of the statistics although this could be improved. Feedback from LAs indicated that the burden of completing these returns is substantial.

1.3.3 The releases are clear and accessible and the commentary provided is helpful. However, this commentary could be expanded to include more contextual information and trends in LA expenditure. This could widen the potential uses of the statistics by increasing users' understanding and interpretation of the statistics.

#### **1.4 Detailed recommendations**

1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the DCLG 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**

<b>Requirement 1</b>	Ensure that all major changes to the statistics are publicised as widely as possible in advance of the release of the changed statistics (para 3.6).
<b>Requirement 2</b>	Publish more information about the quality and reliability, including the strengths and limitations, of the capital and revenue expenditure statistics (para 3.10).
<b>Requirement 3</b>	Publish details of the methods adopted, in particular about the estimation of both capital and revenue expenditure statistics for non-responding LAs (para 3.11).
<b>Requirement 4</b>	Publish information on how capital and revenue expenditure statistics compare with other related statistics (para 3.12).
<b>Requirement 5</b>	Expand the statistical planning process to include the ongoing monitoring of its work programme, resources and outcomes (para 3.21).
<b>Requirement 6</b>	Expand the commentary and analysis to aid interpretation, in particular about the policy and operational context of the capital and revenue expenditure statistics (para 3.23).

## 2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) publishes a range of statistics on local authority (LA) finance for England, covering both capital expenditure and receipts, and revenue expenditure and financing. Capital expenditure refers to investment in LA services, mainly buying, building or improving physical assets such as buildings, land, vehicles and machinery. Capital receipts generally arise from the disposal of fixed assets, for example the sale of council houses. The statistics are published as a forecast; provisional outturn; second provisional outturn; and final outturn with more detailed breakdowns. Revenue expenditure refers to spending on services such as education, housing and social services, and LAs running costs. Revenue expenditure statistics are published in the form of a budget; provisional outturn; and final outturn. DCLG publishes statistics for each LA for both capital and revenue expenditure.
- 2.2 DCLG collects the data it uses to compile capital and revenue expenditure statistics on financial returns from all LAs in England. The reporting of capital and revenue expenditure data is statutory. Capital expenditure data are collected under section 14 of the *Local Government Act 2003*<sup>10</sup>. Revenue expenditure data are collected under section 168 of the *Local Government Act 1972*<sup>11</sup> (for the Revenue Outturn financial forms) and section 139A of the *Local Government Act 1988*<sup>12</sup> (for the Revenue Account financial forms).
- 2.3 The main users of the statistics include HM Treasury, for use when setting the Budget and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for use as the local government component of the National Accounts. DCLG uses the statistics to set and monitor the levels of grants distributed to LAs, and for evaluating the need for further financial support or borrowing. LAs not only supply the data that underpin the statistics, but also use the statistics, for example to compare their spending and performance against other LAs. The business community and general public also use the statistics to monitor LA spending in their area.
- 2.4 DCLG also publishes an annual compendium, *Local Government Financial Statistics England*<sup>13</sup>. This compendium has already been assessed by the Statistics Authority<sup>14</sup>. The Welsh Assembly Government publishes similar statistics<sup>15</sup> on local government finance. The Scottish Government<sup>16</sup> and Northern Ireland<sup>17</sup> also publish similar statistics although these are not directly comparable due to differences in the accounting systems.
- 2.5 DCLG has approximately 7 full-time equivalent staff to produce these statistics.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/26/contents>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1972/70>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/contents>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/financialstatistics202010>

<sup>14</sup> Assessment report 63, <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

<sup>15</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/loc-gov/?lang=en>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Local-Government-Finance>

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/local\\_government/local\\_government\\_funding.htm](http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/local_government/local_government_funding.htm)

### 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 DCLG engages with central and local government users via an established user group, the Finance sub-group of the Central and Local Government Information Partnership (CLIP-F). This group meets three times a year. It includes members from central and local government, the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). The agendas, papers and minutes from these meetings<sup>18</sup> are published on CLIP's website. The LGA circulates papers to finance officers in LAs although some users mentioned to the Assessment team that they did not feel fully engaged. The Assessment team suggests that DCLG ensure that CLIP-F meeting papers and information are disseminated as widely as possible to ensure that all users are aware of the issues being discussed and how they can provide feedback. This could include linking to, and highlighting, the papers and minutes from the CLIP-F meetings on DCLG's website.
- 3.2 In addition to the CLIP-F meetings, DCLG holds quarterly technical meetings with HM Treasury and ONS, to keep them aware of changes in the financial returns, accountancy issues and delivery dates. DCLG statisticians also attend CIPFA conferences and other relevant seminars to discuss the statistics. DCLG responds to enquiries about the statistics via email and telephone, and requests feedback about the statistics on its website.
- 3.3 DCLG told us that it is drafting a statistical work plan for the coming year and that it will hold a formal consultation on this plan in early 2011.
- 3.4 DCLG has recently published a user engagement strategy on its website, in response to Requirements in previous assessment reports<sup>19</sup>. This strategy documents the known uses and users of capital and revenue expenditure statistics as well as DCLG's other statistical releases. We suggest that DCLG provide a link to the user engagement strategy from both the capital and revenue expenditure statistical releases and the statistics area of its website.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.clip.local.gov.uk/lgv/core/page.do?pageId=31626>

<sup>19</sup> See assessment reports 32 and 63

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

## Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.5 DCLG presents its capital and revenue expenditure statistics in an impartial and objective manner, free of charge on its website.
- 3.6 DCLG has published a revisions policy<sup>20</sup> on its website and the local government finance statistics team told us that it follows this policy. DCLG makes frequent changes to the capital and revenue expenditure statistics due to changes in accounting procedures or grant allocation. It highlights these changes in footnotes in the releases to indicate where changes have been made and marks the relevant tables. DCLG discusses changes in advance with the CLIP-F group and with other main users but no announcement is made to ensure that other users, or potential users, are aware of the changes. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCLG should ensure that all major changes to the statistics, i.e. to methodology, quality assurance or definitions are publicised as widely as possible in advance of the release of the changed statistics<sup>21</sup> (Requirement 1).
- 3.7 DCLG told us that it contacts the main users of the statistics and informs them of errors when they occur. Footnotes in the releases are used to inform other users. When significant errors are made by LAs when completing the returns, DCLG told us that a statement accompanies the revised release.

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statisticalnoticerevisionspolicy>

<sup>21</sup> In relation to Principle 2 Practice 4 of the Code of Practice

### **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 pressure, abuses of trust or complaints relating to professional integrity, quality or standards were reported to or identified by the Assessment team.
- 3.9 DCLG discusses any changes in policy that lead to a change in the statistics with users at CLIP-F meetings and the statistical Head of Profession takes the final decision about how such policy changes should be taken into account in the statistics. A policy change could relate, for example, to the introduction of a new grant or funding category for LAs.

## 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.**

- 3.10 DCLG compiles its capital and revenue expenditure statistics from financial data provided on returns from all LAs in England. LAs follow CIPFA's guidance, the *Best Value Accounting Code of Practice*<sup>22</sup>, for completing the returns. DCLG carries out extensive quality assurance and validation of the incoming data, including checking outliers and year-on-year sense checks. The statistics team also uses its knowledge of developments in particular LAs to check the financial reporting. Some users mentioned inconsistent data reporting by LAs as a potential problem when comparing the statistics across LAs. However DCLG told us that the extensive quality assurance procedures ensure that inconsistency is minimised. The Assessment team considers that DCLG should improve the information provided about the quality and reliability of the statistics to respond to users' concerns. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCLG should publish more information about the quality and reliability, including the strengths and limitations, of the capital and revenue expenditure statistics<sup>23</sup> (Requirement 2). We also suggest that DCLG systematically document its quality assurance and validation procedures, in order to improve their resilience.
- 3.11 Although LAs are legally required to submit returns, DCLG told us that occasionally some do not respond. Where a full response is not achieved, the number of responses plus the names of any LAs that did not respond are detailed in the release. DCLG makes estimates for non-responders and item non-response but does not publish any information about how it calculates these estimates. Some users responding to our questions during the assessment also expressed a need for clearer explanations of definitions and the methods used to produce the data. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCLG should publish details of the methods adopted, in particular about the estimation of both capital and revenue expenditure statistics for non-responding LAs<sup>24</sup> (Requirement 3).
- 3.12 Data collected by DCLG in the financial returns on spending on education and health are not comparable with data collected by the Department for Education (DfE) and the Department of Health (DoH). DCLG told us that it is working with these departments to try to reconcile the data collections with a view to being able to share data collection in the future. The Assessment team considers this to be an example of good practice although more could be published about this work. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCLG should publish information about how its capital and revenue expenditure statistics compare with other related statistics<sup>25</sup> (Requirement 4).

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<sup>22</sup> [http://learning.cipfa.org.uk/default.asp?content\\_ref=3245](http://learning.cipfa.org.uk/default.asp?content_ref=3245)

<sup>23</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

<sup>24</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

<sup>25</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practice 6 of the Code of Practice

- 3.13 As part of its plan to publish all of the capital and revenue expenditure data that it collects, DCLG is planning to release quarterly statistics on revenue expenditure as experimental statistics in 2011 to provide users with more up-to-date information. DCLG has engaged with a wide range of users about these proposed experimental statistics to ensure that they meet users' needs.
- 3.14 DCLG provides links to equivalent releases for Wales and Scotland. DCLG told us that due to the differences in financial accounting, these releases cannot be directly compared. However, CIPFA publishes combined statistics for England and Wales. DCLG does not link to capital and revenue expenditure statistics for Northern Ireland. We suggest that DCLG make users aware of the differences between the equivalent statistics in other UK countries in its capital and revenue expenditure releases.
- 3.15 LA expenditure statistics are provided for five years in the capital expenditure releases and for two years in the revenue expenditure releases. Time series are produced on a consistent basis wherever possible although this is often difficult to achieve due to changes in accounting procedures. DCLG includes footnotes in the releases to explain any inconsistencies. Data are available over a longer time period in the compendium publication *Local Government Financial Statistics*.

## 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.**

- 3.16 The statistics published in the capital and revenue expenditure releases are not confidential.
- 3.17 DCLG has published a statement of compliance with the former *National Statistics Code of Practice*<sup>26</sup> outlining its arrangements for protecting confidentiality of the data it collects. As suggested in Assessment Report 63, we suggest DCLG update the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Statement of Compliance with the National Statistics Code of Practice to reflect the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and the current name of the department.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statisticscompliance>

## 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.**

- 3.18 DCLG consults LA finance officers at CLIP-F group meetings about proposed changes to the financial returns. DCLG told us that it works closely with finance officers in order to ensure that they have enough understanding of the data to present them in a sound statistical way. This includes a note to LAs on why the data are important<sup>27</sup>.
- 3.19 Despite the steps taken by DCLG to engage with suppliers and minimise the burden placed upon them, some suppliers told us that they felt that the burden was substantial and that they were not adequately consulted when changes were made to the forms that they are asked to complete. The Assessment team suggests that DCLG consider ways of engaging more effectively with data suppliers about the burden of existing, and any new, data requirements.
- 3.20 As noted in paragraph 3.12, and in Assessment Report 63, there is some duplication with financial data collected by DCLG, DfE and DoH. DCLG told us that it is working with both departments to reconcile the data collections and minimise the burden on LAs.

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/1193664.pdf>

## 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.**

- 3.21 Statistical activity is not centralised within DCLG and there is no single budget covering all statistical activities. DCLG has recently put in place a statistical planning process, outlining the process for drafting and consulting on its annual plan for all statistical releases. However this plan does not cover how DCLG will monitor expenditure against its work programme or the relationship between the statistical planning process, resources and outcomes. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCLG should expand the statistical planning process to include the ongoing monitoring of its work programme, resources and outcomes<sup>28</sup> (Requirement 5).
- 3.22 DCLG follows Government Statistical Service (GSS) recruitment processes and uses the GSS competency framework. It requires its statistical staff to undertake continuing professional development.

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<sup>28</sup> In relation to Principle 7 Practices 3 and 4 of the Code of Practice

## **Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility**

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

- 3.23 The capital and revenue expenditure statistical releases are well presented and easily accessible. They include some key points about the statistics presented. However this could be expanded to be more insightful, aid interpretation and to better explain the wider context of the figures, such as including some comparisons over time and general trends in LA spending. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCLG should expand the commentary and analysis to aid interpretation, in particular about the policy and operational context of the capital and revenue expenditure statistics<sup>29</sup> (Requirement 6).
- 3.24 DCLG publishes some information about quality in the statistical releases although this could be improved – see comments under Principle 4.
- 3.25 DCLG publishes data for individual LAs for both capital and revenue expenditure on its website in Excel format. The Assessment team suggests that DCLG signpost the availability of the LA level data tables in the capital and revenue expenditure statistical releases.

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<sup>29</sup> In relation to Principle 8 Practice 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.**

3.26 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.**

- 3.27 DCLG publishes a release timetable<sup>30</sup> on its website and pre-announces the release of the statistics on the National Statistics Publication Hub. A provisional month or two month period is given, with firm dates announced two weeks before the scheduled release to allow for the late return of data by LAs. We suggest that DCLG give a more precise indication of when statistics will be released and announce firm publication dates 4 weeks in advance.
- 3.28 All releases contain the name of the responsible statistician and their contact details.
- 3.29 DCLG publishes pre-release access lists<sup>31</sup> in conjunction with the statistics. These appear to be fairly short, consisting of around eight people, all within DCLG.

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/researchandstatistics/statistics/publicationschedule/>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/researchandstatistics/statistics/prereleaseaccess/>

### **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.**

3.30 The capital and revenue expenditure statistics are based on financial returns completed by LAs. The data for these returns are taken from the LAs administrative accounting systems. DCLG has published a Statement of Administrative Sources<sup>32</sup> on its website. The Statement covers the administrative database managed by DCLG where the administrative data are stored.

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/researchandstatistics/statistics/nationalstatistics/>

## Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to DCLG's capital and revenue expenditure 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.

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| <b>Suggestion 1</b> | Ensure that CLIP-F meeting papers and information are disseminated as widely as possible to ensure that all users are aware of the issues being discussed and how they can provide feedback (para 3.1).  |
| <b>Suggestion 2</b> | Provide a link to the user engagement strategy from both the capital and revenue expenditure statistical releases and the statistics area of its website (para 3.4).   |
| <b>Suggestion 3</b> | Systematically document the quality assurance and validation procedures, in order to improve their resilience (para 3.10).   |
| <b>Suggestion 4</b> | Make users aware of the differences between the equivalent statistics in other UK countries in the capital and revenue expenditure releases (para 3.14).   |
| <b>Suggestion 5</b> | Update the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Statement of Compliance with the National Statistics Code of Practice to reflect the <i>Code of Practice for Official Statistics</i> and the current name of the department (para 3.17). |
| <b>Suggestion 6</b> | Consider ways of engaging more effectively with data suppliers about the burden of existing, and any new, data requirements (para 3.19).   |
| <b>Suggestion 7</b> | Signpost the availability of LA level data tables in the capital and revenue expenditure releases (para 3.25).   |
| <b>Suggestion 8</b> | Give a more precise indication of when statistics will be released and announce firm publication dates 4 weeks in advance (para 3.27).   |

## **Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views**

- A2.1 This assessment was conducted from September 2010 to March 2011.
- A2.2 The Assessment team – Cathy Kruger and Kat Pegler – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of DCLG in September. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 2 November. The Assessment team subsequently met DCLG during December 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**

- A2.3 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.
- A2.4 The Assessment team received 9 responses from the user/supplier consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:
- |                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| DCLG                         | 1 |
| Other government departments | 5 |
| Local authorities            | 2 |
| Private sector               | 1 |
- A2.5 Most users reported that they are happy with the statistics provided, the way in which they are presented and the level of engagement they have with DCLG. However, some users expressed concerns about the consistency of the data and felt that they were not adequately consulted about the statistics. Users would also like to see more frequent statistics on LAs current spending and a clearer explanation of the terms and methods used to collect the data.
- A2.6 Data suppliers indicated that a significant burden is placed upon them since the forms can be very time consuming to complete. They also raised concerns about the degree of ambiguity in the information requested and noted that they are not adequately consulted when changes are made to the data collected.

### **Key documents/links provided**

Written Evidence for Assessment document



