



HM Treasury, 1 Horse Guards Road, London, SW1A 2HQ

30 July 2011

Mr Bernard Jenkin MP
Public Administration Select Committee
Committee Office
House of Commons
7 Milbank
London
SW1P 3JA

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Jen Bernard,'.

RE: BREACH OF PRE-RELEASE ACCESS: CONSUMER PRICE INDICES

You wrote to me on the 23 June following discussions in the Public Administration Select Committee concerning the technical breach at the official level of the April Consumer Price Indices at the Treasury. This was an unfortunate incident. I hope you will agree that the action taken by my department both immediately afterwards, and with respect to the corrective procedures now in place, demonstrate the seriousness with which Government takes its responsibilities under the pre-release protocol. As Sir Michael identified, the breach was committed by a Treasury official. I am reassured that the corrective procedures implemented mitigate the risks associated with this type of human error and the interactions with IT systems occurring in the future. The specifics are detailed in the breach report submitted by the Treasury to the UK Statistics Authority in May.

Sir Michael's letter of the 26 May, asked for my reflections on whether the pre-release access, as set out in the Pre-Release Order 2008 should be further tightened.

Shortly after taking office, the Government carefully considered the arrangements on pre-release alongside the recommendations made by the UK Statistics Authority. Francis Maude, as minister responsible for the arrangements, set out the Government's considered position in a letter to Sir Michael on the 27 July 2010. In that letter he stated the existing arrangements would continue. This remains our view.

Official statistics are crucial to hold the Government to account for its policy decisions. The current arrangements enable this. The public expect a response at the time of release. Government's one year review of the arrangements showed that any further reduction would not allow Government sufficient time to provide a response in time for the release of the statistics. This accountability does not apply in the same way to other users of statistics.

The Government is committed to keeping pre-release access to the absolute minimum, striking a balance between keeping the list small, while enabling Ministers and their officials to undertake their duties effectively and efficiently. In the case of the Treasury I am aware that last September, Sir Nicholas Macpherson in a letter to the National Statistician, set out reductions relating to both the statistics which my department has pre-release access to and those persons who have been granted such access. Other Government departments have also provided reductions in the number of people who have advance sight of official statistics.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority - Sir Michael Scholar, who first wrote to me on this issue, the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, the Secretary of State for Business, Sir Gus O'Donnell, the Governor of the Bank of England, Sir Nicholas Macpherson and Valerie Isham, President of the Royal Statistical Society, who also wrote to me on this issue.

ged under,



GEORGE OSBORNE