
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

Bernard Jenkin MP
Chair, Public Administration Select Committee
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

2 September 2014

Dear Bernard

Public Administration Select Committee – Thirteenth Report

I am writing in response to the Committee's report on crime statistics, published on 9 April 2014.

The Committee's report made a number of recommendations to the UK Statistics Authority and the Office for National Statistics (ONS), and I enclose at **Annex A** responses to each of those.

I would also like to take this opportunity briefly to set out developments in the area of crime statistics, since the Committee's report was published.

The Authority's view remains that the transfer of responsibility for crime statistics from the Home Office to ONS in 2012 was an important step in improving the independence and integrity of these statistics.

ONS statisticians, in their January 2013 analysis of the variation in crime trends, brought to light many of the issues the Committee subsequently commented on in its report, and have already started to respond to the recommendations of the Authority's *Assessment of Crime Statistics in England and Wales*, published in January 2014. Staff are working closely with representatives from the Home Office and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary to improve both the quality of the underlying data provided to the Home Office by police forces in England and Wales, and the robustness of ongoing audit and quality assurance procedures. The broader aim of this work is to secure the re-designation of police recorded crime statistics for England and Wales as National Statistics.

Alongside this work, under the direction of the Authority's Head of Assessment, the Authority is exploring the implications of its assessment of crime statistics for other official statistics

and in July published an exposure draft of a monitoring review on the quality assurance and auditing of administrative data.¹

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Dilnot". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

¹ www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/administrative-data-and-official-statistics/index.html

ANNEX A. AUTHORITY RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

2. We recommend that UKSA urgently investigate the quality of crime statistics in Scotland and Northern Ireland and their compliance with the Code of Practice, in the light of the findings of this inquiry, and UKSA's decision to remove the 'National Statistics' kitemark from crime statistics in England and Wales. (Paragraph 8)

The Authority's assessment of crime statistics in England and Wales² detailed an accumulation of evidence suggesting that police recorded crime data may not be reliable. Against this backdrop, we share the Committee's view that it is timely to re-assess statistics based on police recorded crime in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The Authority announced its intention to re-assess Scottish police recorded crime statistics in March 2014 and the full assessment report was published in July.³ As set out in the Authority's Assessment work programme, statistics based on police recorded crime in Northern Ireland are also scheduled to be re-assessed by the Authority later this year.

12. We recommend that the ONS review and then publish, alongside the Crime Survey for England and Wales, information about the nature of the sample, including the impact of the reduction in sample size on the reliability of the statistics, its cost over time, and an explanation of what statistics might be published at a sub-national level, for example for the larger police forces. (Paragraph 46)

In response to the Authority's assessment of crime statistics in England and Wales, ONS has already published additional information on the reduction in the sample size of the Crime Survey for England and Wales.⁴ This explains the impact of the reduction in the sample in April 2012, which resulted from budgetary cuts. ONS are also currently reviewing the production of sub-national estimates and will bring forward options for users' consideration later this year.

19. We recommend UKSA works closely with the Home Office in its role as the first recipient of raw data from forces, and ensures the Home Office takes active primary operational responsibility and accepts accountability for ensuring the integrity of the data which it collates, validates and submits to the ONS for publication. UKSA should hold the Home Office directly accountable for its role in the recorded crime statistics process, including its validation and quality assurance processes as well as its policy guidance to forces and Police and Crime Commissioners, and should in future examine the Home Office's processes and procedures directly rather than at one remove. (Paragraph 60)

As part of its work to address the weaknesses in the police recorded crime process, ONS is working closely with the Home Office to review and improve the processes by which police recorded crime data is collated and validated with police forces.

² www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/correspondence/letter-from-sir-andrew-dilnot-to-bernard-jenkin-mp-150114.pdf

³ www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-288--statistics-on-recorded-crime-in-scotland.pdf

⁴ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/crime-statistics-methodology/user-guide-to-crime-statistics.pdf>

As with other statistical releases, the Authority expects both the collectors of data and the producers of statistics to play an important role in ensuring the integrity of underlying data and resultant statistics. It will consider whether the improvements made by ONS and the Home Office in collating and validating police recorded crime data are sufficient, when it re-assesses crime statistics.

21. We recommend that UKSA should review the role and composition of CSAC and the structures supporting the production of crime statistics, just as it has recently with a similar committee advising on inflation figures, to ensure that CSAC is independent and rigorous and that these statistics best meet user needs in future. (Paragraph 62)

The Authority considers that it is good practice that the performance of its Boards and Committees be regularly reviewed. The Crime Statistics Advisory Committee is to conduct a review of its effectiveness in September 2014. The Authority will consider that review when it is completed.

23. UKSA must not in future grant to, or maintain, the kitemark of 'National Statistics' on any set of statistics where it has failed to verify whether the underlying data meets the standard required. They should, as a matter of urgency, review all other similar statistics where collection processes are beyond the control of the ONS. UKSA should review the Code of Practice for Official Statistics to determine whether it needs to be revised to allow for the new emphasis on administrative data. (Paragraph 65)

As the Committee noted in its report, the Authority has already launched a programme of work on the use of administrative data in official statistics. As part of this work, the Authority has considered how underlying data are currently being audited, and ways in which auditing arrangements can be improved. An exposure draft of this work was published in July, and following consultation, a final report will be published before the end of 2014.

Alongside this work, the Authority continues to assess the compliance of official statistics against the Code of Practice. As set out above, it has recently published its re-assessment of police recorded crime statistics in Scotland, and the re-assessment of police recorded crime statistics in Northern Ireland is scheduled to commence later this year.

Furthermore, in order that we may prioritise assessments which drive change and provide maximum assurance to users, the Authority has recently published updated criteria for prioritising assessments.⁵

⁵ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/programme-of-assessment/criteria-for-prioritising-assessments.pdf>