
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

Mr Jack Dromey MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

18 February 2016

Dear Mr Dromey,

COMMUNICATION OF CRIME STATISTICS

My attention has been drawn to comments made in a Labour Party press release¹ following the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) publication of the latest crime statistics for England and Wales²; in particular that the press release presented the statistics on police recorded crime as demonstrating that crime was rising, without appropriate caveats.

In a letter to Chris Kelly MP, in November 2013, copied to you³ I underlined the importance of ensuring that all statements made on the basis of official statistics summarise statistical trends accurately and with appropriate balance and caveats; it is particularly important to do this in relation to crime statistics as we approach the Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May of this year.

The Authority has reviewed the Labour Party press release and concluded that the statistics it used were quoted accurately. However, by focusing on police recorded crime without appropriate caveats, and omitting evidence from the more complete and reliable source (for most violent crimes) of the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), it may have given, in parts, a misleading impression.

In January 2014 the UK Statistics Authority removed National Statistics status from police recorded crime statistics following an assessment⁴ which found that the administrative data on which they are based did not meet our expected standards of trustworthiness and quality. Our particular concern was that they reflected recording practices rather than actual crime. If the police improve recording practices as we required, an increase in police recorded crime would be expected.

ONS's recent publication of quarterly crime statistics indicated a non-significant reduction of 6% in the estimate of *all* crimes measured by the CSEW (a representative survey of the

¹ <http://press.labour.org.uk/post/137742705989/recorded-crime-up-6-per-cent-the-biggest-increase>

² <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/crime-in-england-and-wales---year-ending-september-2015/stb-crime-sept-2015.html>

³ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence-list/?keyword=kelly&date=2013>

⁴ https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publications-list/?keyword=&type=assessment-report&theme=crime-and-justice&producer=office-for-national-statistics&date=2014_

population resident in households) and a non-significant reduction of 1% in the CSEW estimate of *violent* crime experienced by the household population since the previous year. Other sources, such as surveys of NHS Accident and Emergency departments and hospital admissions related to violent assault, are consistent with CSEW trends for violent crime.

In its publication, ONS explained that the large volume increases in violence against the person offences, and the increases in sexual offences and rape that the police recorded, were more likely to be driven by factors related to reporting and recording rather than to reflect a real increase. Among the factors that ONS highlighted is action taken by police forces to improve their compliance with the National Crime Recording Standard, given the renewed focus on the accuracy of crime recording by the police. A second factor is victims' increased willingness to report sexual offences and rape and subsequent recording of these offences by the police.

Changes in recording practices generally affect homicides and knife crime less than other types of violence and ONS commented in its publication that while it thought the general volume increases in violent crime were an artefact of recording changes, this was not the case for these two categories of crime.

I have attached the Main Points summary from the latest ONS release on crime statistics for England and Wales to this letter at Annex A.

I continue to hold the view that sufficient steps should be taken to summarise statistical trends accurately and with appropriate balance and caveats.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Dilnot". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

Annex A

Crime in England and Wales, year ending September 2015, Main Points.⁵

- The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) shows there were an estimated 6.6 million incidents of crime covered by the survey in the year ending September 2015. This latest estimate was not significantly different compared with the previous year's.
- There was a 6% increase in police recorded crime compared with the previous year, with 4.3million offences recorded in the year ending September 2015. Most of this rise is thought to be due to a greater proportion of reports of crime being recorded in the last year, following improved compliance with national recording standards by police forces.
- Improvements in recording of crime are thought to have particularly affected some categories of violent crime recorded by the police. There was a 27% rise in violence against the person offences (an additional 185,666 offences) which was largely driven by increases within the violence without injury sub-group (up by 130,207 offences; a 37% increase). The CSEW estimate for violent crime showed no significant change compared with the previous year's survey.
- There were also increases in some of the more serious types of police recorded violence, including a 9% rise in offences involving knives or sharp instruments and a 4% increase in offences involving firearms. Such offences are less likely to be prone to changes in recording practices though there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that a tightening of recording procedures may also be contributing to some of the increase in some forces.
- Sexual offences recorded by the police continued to rise with the latest figures up 36% on the previous year; equivalent to an additional 26,606 offences. The numbers of rapes (33,431) and other sexual offences (66,178) were at the highest level since the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard in the year ending March 2003. As well as improvements in recording, this is also thought to reflect a greater willingness of victims to come forward to report such crimes.
- There was a 5% increase in the volume of fraud offences referred to the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB) at the City of London Police. Over 0.6 million offences were referred to NFIB, including 234,878 offences reported by victims to Action Fraud (the UK's national fraud reporting centre), 283,654 referrals from Cifas (a UK-wide fraud prevention service) and 86,066 cases from FFA UK (that represents the UK payments industry). It is known that many cases of fraud do not come to the attention of the police, and these figures provide a very partial picture.

⁵ Available at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/crime-in-england-and-wales---year-ending-september-2015/index.html>