
Deputy Director for Regulation

Siobhan Carey, CBE
Chief Executive and Registrar General
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

28 August 2018

Dear Siobhan,

**STATISTICS FROM THE NORTHERN IRELAND SAFE COMMUNITIES SURVEY –
SET-UP PHASE**

We recently completed our check of compliance with the *Code of Practice for Statistics*¹ of statistics from the Northern Ireland Safe Communities Survey². We focused on the set-up-phase of the survey that led up to the start of interviews in April 2018. We considered trustworthiness, quality and value, all of which are fundamental to supporting public confidence in statistics and, together, form the basis of the Code.

We were pleased to see the ways in which the team that produces the statistics is working towards improving the value of the statistics and data and to introduce changes that will improve their quality and support positive perceptions of the trustworthiness of the Department of Justice and NISRA:

- Financial resources to support the collection of more robust data, have increased from the 2018-19 survey
- The survey sample size increased to 4,000 from April 2018, in response to feedback about the suitability of the existing statistics from the survey for the proposed measure of safe communities during the development of the Programme for Government framework
- The team identified a demand for statistics and data broken down by local area and is currently considering how this might be met. We look forward to seeing how this work develops
- The team showed creative thinking on accommodating demand from policy teams to collect data that reflect important issues not previously covered by the survey and that will be of interest to a wider audience
- During survey-set-up, the team had extensive dialogue with users and potential users in government about their needs and proposed changes and took account of those needs
- The team is considering ways to meet the demand from outside government for data about children's experience of crime that came to light during the development of the Programme for Government framework and intends to issue a scoping paper on this. We look forward to seeing how this work develops

¹ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/>

² Previously known as the Northern Ireland Crime Survey: <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/northern-ireland-crime-survey>

We identified improvements that would help achieve the ambition the Code has for the purpose and value of official statistics; this ambition is reflected in the high standards the Code now expects of National Statistics:

- In the future, we encourage DoJ and NISRA to ensure available resources – both financial and people – are sufficient on an ongoing basis to demonstrate trustworthiness and to continue to improve the quality of the statistics and data and to realise more of their potential value
- To demonstrate trustworthiness, we encourage the statistics team to be open about unmet demands and what work is being done to address them by publishing priorities and plans.
- Statistics on the proportion of adults who are victims of crime in Northern Ireland would better reflect experience of crime in the adult populations if estimates of fraud and computer misuse were included in the main estimates of crime. Until they do, the limitations of the statistics on victimisation need to be described very clearly alongside the statistics
- We encourage the team to find creative ways to build and maintain dialogue beyond government and its agencies among those who use, or who have the potential to use, the statistics and data from the survey to demonstrate their value
- We encourage the team to collaborate with statisticians who run similar surveys in other parts of the UK to benefit from their support and experiences
- Meeting the clear demand to understand child victimisation will require innovative thinking. We look forward to seeing how this work develops

I know that both you and the statistics team share our ambition for these statistics and I encourage you to continue the improvements we have seen during our work. I appreciate that resources are constrained and that, even without these limitations, the improvements set out above will undoubtedly require further creative thinking to achieve. Our overall view, is that recently available resources for this survey have been inadequate, and the statistics are only now starting to realise again some of the value that similar surveys across the UK achieve. I would be grateful for your careful consideration of the findings in this letter and would welcome details of how you plan to address them.

We will carry out further checks on compliance with the Code as the data collection and statistics production progress. We will publish an overall report of our assessment of the statistics from the Northern Ireland Safe Communities Survey at the end of these checks. Until then, I look forward to seeing the trustworthiness, quality and value of the statistics continue to improve.

I am copying this letter to Tracy Power, Director of Analysis NISRA; Stephen Donnelly, NISRA and Gayle Kennedy, Department of Justice.

Your sincerely



Mary Gregory

Deputy Director for Regulation

Annex: Review of statistics from the Northern Ireland Safe Communities Survey (formerly Northern Ireland Crime Survey)

Trustworthiness: T4 Transparent processes and management – Organisations should have effective business processes and appropriate resources to support their statistical functions and be open about their plans, priorities and progress.	
Evidence provided by Department of Justice	Office for Statistics Regulation’s evaluation of evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The published report³ that announced a change to the sample size and other subsequent publications make clear that the previous decision about reducing the sample size to 2,000 was driven by cost • Funding was made available to double the survey sample size to 4,000 in the 2018-19 survey because of it being the data source for the proposed safe communities measure (the percentage of victims of crime) in the Programme for Government framework • The statistics team is small and has limited resource to carry out the work to develop the survey that they have the ambition to do • The statistics team published a document that sets out the main changes introduced following the survey review and public consultation 	<p>Areas that demonstrate trustworthiness through having appropriate resources to support their statistical function:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial resources to collect more robust data on the experience of crime have increased for the 2018/19 survey <p>Areas to improve to meet the ambition of the Code for statistics and data that give confidence in the people and organisations that produce them:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources to develop the survey are stretched, which can affect the extent to which the statistics serve the public good. For example, the scoping paper on meeting the need for information about children as victims is delayed due to resource constraints • No details have been published about demand that has been identified and is, as yet, unmet; this includes the demand for local area data and data about children <p><u>Looking to the future</u></p> <p>We would encourage DoJ and NISRA to ensure sufficient resources are secured on an ongoing basis for these statistics and data so that they can better serve the public good.</p> <p>To demonstrate trustworthiness, we would encourage the statistics team to be open about unmet demands, the reasons why they are unmet and what plans, if any, there are to address them.</p>

³ <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/change-northern-ireland-crime-survey-nics-sample-size>

Quality: Suitable data sources – Statistics should be based on the most appropriate data to meet intended uses. The impact of any data limitations for use should be assessed, minimised and explained; Sound methods – Producers of statistics and data should use the best available methods and recognised standards and be open about their decisions

Evidence from the Department of Justice	Office for Statistics Regulation’s evaluation of evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The percentage of victims of any crime, as estimated by the survey, was proposed as lead measure for safe communities in the Programme for Government framework • The statistics team conducted a review of the survey following feedback in the Programme for Government framework consultation about the limitations of survey as a source of data for the proposed safe communities measure of the percentage of victims of crime • Questions on perceptions of fraud will be included in the survey every second year from 2019–20. Data on experience of fraud and computer misuse will not be incorporated into statistics on the percentage of adults who are victims of crime • Some question modules will also be rotated every second year as a way of meeting demand for space on the survey • The survey sample size will increase its previous size of 2,000 to 4,000 in the 2018-19 survey 	<p>Areas that will help to ensure that the statistics are based on appropriate data to meet intended uses and use the best available methods:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The survey sample size will increase to 4,000 from April 2018, following feedback on the suitability of the statistics proposed as a measure in the Programme for Government framework • The team is considering how it might meet demand for local area data, initially calculating required sample sizes and exploring costs • The team has met the demand from policy and other government colleagues for new question areas that they uncovered during the review by introducing rotating modules; without this creative thinking, these would not all have been accommodated <p>Areas to improve to meet the ambition of the Code for data and methods that produce assured statistics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excluding fraud from estimates of crime means that the statistics will not reflect current crime as experienced by the adult population in Northern Ireland
Other evidence we considered	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Including fraud to estimates of crime experienced by the adult population in England and Wales resulted in an increase from 14% to 20% of adults estimated to be the victims of crime • The 4,000 sample size still has limitations. For example, as shown in the latest report⁴, an increase or decrease of 1.4% would be needed on the measure of all crime (measured by the survey) experienced by adults of 8.7% before it could confidently detect a change 	<p><u>Looking to the future</u></p> <p>We would encourage the statistics team to consider collecting data about fraud and computer misuse in a way that means it can be included in estimates of the percentage of the general adult population who are victims of any crime. Until this happens, the limitations of these statistics should be clearly articulated.</p>

⁴ Experience of Crime: findings from the Northern Ireland Crime Survey, February 2018, Table A1. <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/publications/research-and-statistical-bulletin-92018-experience-crime-findings-201617-northern-ireland-crime>

Value: V1 Relevance to users – Users of statistics and data should be at the centre of statistical production; their needs should be understood, their views sought and acted on, and their use of statistics supported; V4 Innovation and improvement – Statistics producers should be creative and motivated to improve statistics and data...

Evidence provided by Department of Justice	Office for Statistics Regulation’s evaluation of evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The objective of the survey review was to review the scope and content of the Northern Ireland Crime Survey to ensure it meets customer requirements in alignment with Departmental and Programme for Government priorities • The statistics team consulted widely with departmental policy officials and other stakeholders in the Department of Justice during the survey review • The team emailed existing users of the statistics from outside central government; it issued an open invitation to respond to the review and ran a public consultation about changes to the survey • Feedback from this activity was limited, resulting in 8 responses, but the email to existing users uncovered a need for local data • The team considered the demand for statistics on children uncovered in the Programme for Government framework consultation, concluding that the existing survey was not a suitable data collection vehicle • The team have introduced some changes to the survey following development work done by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on the Crime Survey for England and Wales including changing the upper age limit for the self-completion part of the survey • The team is aware of other changes that ONS is introducing - such as the methods for measuring series incidents that affects statistics on domestic abuse in particular – but has not had dialogue with ONS about this change 	<p>Areas that have increased the relevance of the statistics to users and improved the statistics and data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The extensive dialogue the team had with users, and attempts to include potential users of the statistics, in central government and its agencies • Following the conclusion that the demand for data on children’s experience of crime could not be met through the existing survey, the team intends to issue a scoping paper on this <p>Areas to improve to meet the ambition of the Code for statistics that support society’s needs for information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beyond central government and its agencies, contact with users during the review and consultation was not extensive or, in most cases, proactive, and generated little comment <p><u>Looking to the future</u></p> <p>We would encourage the statistics team to engage publicly and extend and maintain an open dialogue with those beyond government who use or have the potential to use the statistics and data from the survey to demonstrate their wider value.</p> <p>We would also encourage the statistics team to collaborate closely with statisticians who run similar surveys in other parts of the UK, for example, to benefit from the support of ONS, including keeping up with changes to best practice and hearing about experiences of introducing changes to the survey and the experiences of Scottish Government including making efficient and effective use of limited resources.</p> <p>Innovative thinking will be needed to identify how to meet the clear demand to understand child victimisation.</p>
Other evidence we considered	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The strong demand for, and widespread interest in, statistics and data from similar surveys in other parts of the UK 	