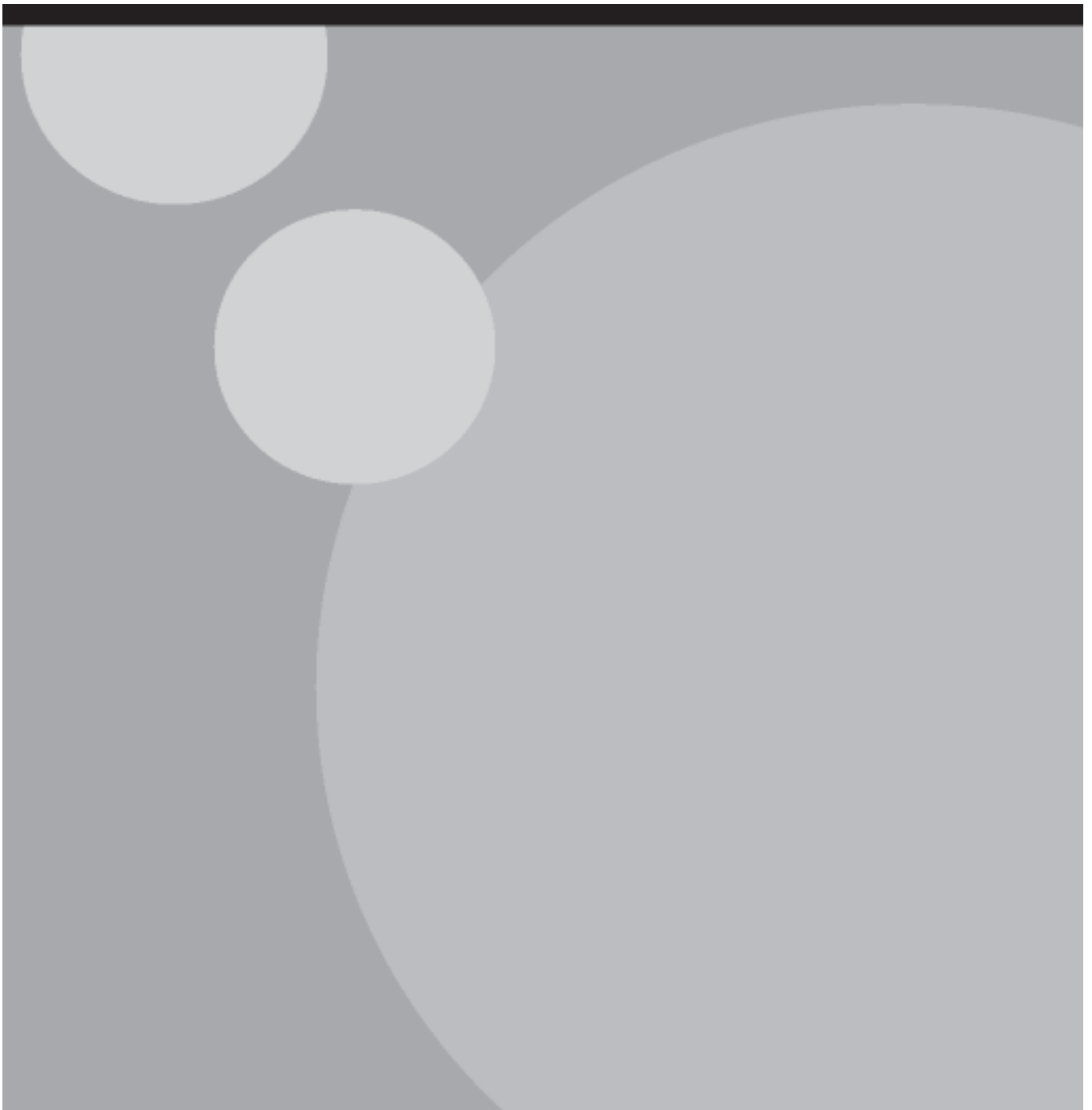


Engagement strategy to meet the needs of statistics users





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November 2010
Department for Communities and Local government

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Contents

Introduction	2
Our approach to user engagement	2
Our vision and strategic objectives	2
Key principles	3
Our users and their uses	4
Means of engagement	5
Publication and dissemination	7
Governance and administration	8
Contact details	9
Links to supporting annexes	10

Introduction

Statistical legislation has placed the user community at the heart of the UK statistical system. The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007¹ charged the UK Statistics Authority with the duty to 'promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good'. To achieve this objective the Authority has published a Code of Practice for producers of official statistics which incorporates a wide range of 'Principles' and 'Practices' designed to ensure that users have a strong voice in the production of official statistics, and that the producers of those statistics achieve the objective of 'Meeting user needs'.

Our approach to user engagement

This document sets out the overall strategy which the Department for Communities and Local Government (the Department) has adopted for engaging with our customers and meeting their statistical needs; and thereby complying with those elements of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics which relate to user requirements. Our overall strategy is reinforced by, and links to, a set of more detailed documents which describe the different arrangements for engaging with users which have been adopted by each of the individual business areas in the Department responsible for producing official statistics ([see Annexes, which for ease of access and to permit updating have been published as a separate set](#)).

Our vision and strategic objectives

The aim of our strategy is to establish and nurture a mutually beneficial partnership between the producers and users of the Department's statistics which is based on trust, and on continuous and open dialogue. The key objective of the Department's strategy will be to meet users' needs through regular delivery of a portfolio of statistical products and services which, subject to considerations of practicality, legality, and funding:

- are trusted and thus authoritative
- reflect the views of users and are, therefore, relevant to the full range of uses to which they are put
- strike the right balance between users' diverse and sometimes competing needs
- are published in an open and standardised format
- are presented and disseminated in ways which suit the wider community
- are accompanied by suitable explanation and documentation (e.g. on their quality)
- anticipate, and respond to, changes in users' needs.

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/18/contents>

Our strategy will operate in the context of the government's wider initiative to reduce the reporting requirements placed on local authorities and other data providers.

Key principles

Our strategy for maintaining and developing our partnership with the user community, and evaluating their needs, will be implemented in accordance with the following key principles:

Clarity - we will explain what sort of statistics we produce, and point users to where they can be found.

Accessibility - we will make it easy for users to find and download our products, or use our services, which will be free at the point of delivery.

Familiarity - we will endeavour to identify our existing users (and, where practicable, our potential users); their interests in our statistics; and the uses to which they are likely to put our statistics. Using this knowledge, we will maintain a regular and constructive dialogue with our key users so that they can make their views known and influence our decisions.

Inclusiveness - we will recognise the wide diversity in our user community; their differing needs and expectations; their differing degree of familiarity with official statistics; and their different levels of technical expertise.

Transparency - we will be open about any decisions that are likely to impact on users and we will encourage, welcome, and respond openly to their enquiries, representations and feedback. We will also ensure that our policies and procedures for user engagement are clear and easy to use.

Prioritisation - we will pay particular attention to the needs of those who use our statistics regularly and extensively - subject to our overall commitment to the user community as a whole.

Coherence - we will liaise with users and manage their needs in a co-ordinated, holistic and cost-effective fashion in order to maximise the benefits and minimise the burdens.

Planning - we will ensure that 'User Engagement' becomes an integral feature of our statistical planning and prioritisation procedures.

Flexibility - as resources permit, we will endeavour to respond quickly to changing user needs.

Value for money - we will aim to meet users' needs in the most efficient and cost-effective way, and in a manner which is mindful of the reporting burden placed on data providers.

Our users and their uses

Our customer-base is comprised of a wide range of individuals and groups who represent the whole spectrum of users, and who use our statistics in a wide variety of ways:

Ministers and officials in the Department for Communities and Local Government use our statistics to formulate and gauge the effectiveness of government policies covering such areas as housing, homelessness, land use, planning, etc, and to allocate budgetary resources to local authorities;

Ministers and officials in other government departments and agencies use our statistics to meet their own policy aims and objectives. The Treasury, for instance, utilise our data on local government finance as a key input to the Budget; the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee use our House Price Index to monitor the degree of asset price inflation in the economy; The Department for Energy and Climate Change use data from the English Housing Survey to monitor fuel poverty and the energy efficiency of housing.

Parliament and politicians use our statistics to provide a window on the work of government, and to call the executive to account.

Organisations in other countries, and especially international organisations, use our statistics as a performance benchmark when making international comparisons.

Local government councillors and officials use our statistics (e.g. on housing) to prioritise, plan, target and manage the services they provide to the communities within their own administrative areas.

Businesses use our statistics (e.g. household projections) to underpin their commercial and marketing strategies.

Academics, researchers, and students have used our data (e.g. the Citizenship Survey) for further analysis e.g. as predictors of societal outcomes.

Charities, voluntary organisations and the like use our statistics (e.g. on homelessness) to assess and develop appropriate intervention strategies.

Opinion-formers and the media use our statistics to evaluate the state of the nation; to monitor the Government's performance against its stated aims (relating, for example, to house-building); and to draw comparisons between local authorities (e.g. with respect to their different levels of Council Tax).

Citizens and communities use our statistics to judge the record of their elected representatives on issues such as social cohesion, social housing, local services, etc.

Means of engagement

We will exploit the full range of opportunities for developing and strengthening our links with users in order to give them a voice in the production and development of our official statistics. We will do so on either a bilateral basis, or multilaterally, e.g. through the relevant theme groups (producer-led meetings which promote the harmonisation of statistics across government):

- **High-level representation** - where possible and appropriate, we will either participate in, or make representations to, any recognised user groups or user-focused events sponsored by bodies such as the UK Statistics Authority, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the Royal Statistical Society (RSS), the Statistics User Forum (SUF), the Statistics Suppliers and User Group (StatSUG), etc.
- **Direct user interface** - we will continue, and develop, our alliances or relationships with any bodies, associations or user groups which have a vested interest in our statistics:
 - The main associations with which we engage are:
 - The Central and Local Government Information Partnership (CLIP)
 - The Local Government Association (LGA)
 - The Chartered Institute of Professional and Financial Accountants (CIPFA).
 - The main User Groups with whom we currently engage are:
 - British Urban and Regional Information Systems Association (BURISA)
 - CLIP (Finance), CLIP (Housing) and CLIP (Planning)
 - Fire and Rescue Services User Group (FRSUG)
 - Local Authority Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA)
 - Housing Statistics Users Network.
- **Advisory Ccouncils / steering groups** - where there is an identifiable need, and where appropriate, we will establish and support groups of users who have a common interest in a specific DCLG survey or product. The Citizenship Technical Advisory Group; the English Housing Survey Advisory Group; the Land Use Data Analysis Group; and the Household Projections Expert Steering Group typify this type of arrangement.
- **Public consultations*** - we will consult users and the general public after we introduce a new product, or when we are contemplating the withdrawal of a statistical product or service, or a substantial modification to our procedures for collecting, compiling or producing statistics. Our public consultations, and our

responses to those consultations, will be carried out in accordance with the Government's *Code of Practice on Consultation* (To view, click on the link below).

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/better-regulation/consultation-guidance>

***[Note:** There will be cases where a proposed change is so small, straightforward or non-contentious that we may decide that a full consultation is not appropriate because, for example, it would not justify the use of limited resources or the resultant burden on those consulted]

- **Listening events** (such as conferences, seminars, focus groups, road-shows, etc.) - we will organise user-focused events if we believe, together with our users, that such an approach will meet business/user requirements and provide value-for-money.
- **Web tools** - where appropriate, we will maintain facilities on the Department's website which are designed to enhance the user experience by bringing several user-focused services together under one electronic roof. The 'Places Database' is a case in point.
- **Newsletters / notifications** - where there is strong user demand, and where resources permit, we will issue bulletins relating to specific statistical collections or products. More generally, we will notify users of any matter about which they need to be informed or consulted.
- **Market research** - where appropriate, and where information cannot be obtained via other means, we will conduct either generic or specific customer surveys in order to assess user satisfaction with our products and services.
- **One-to-one engagement** - we will maintain formal and informal contacts with individual or specific users on a bilateral basis where such relationships are likely to continue to be to the mutual benefit of both parties.
- **Feedback** - we will publish guidance on the Department's website and in our statistical releases on how users can provide us with feedback on our products and services, and on their experiences of using DCLG's official statistics, so that their opinions can inform future activities and releases.
- **Formal agreements** - if we enter into a significant partnership with another government department we will work to a formal concordat or service level agreement.
- **Informal links** - we will maintain links with our statistical customers in other departments via the Government Statistical Service (GSS) network and through committees such as the GSS Theme Groups.

Publication and dissemination

Our primary means of communicating and engaging with our customers will continue to be through our portfolio of statistical products which we will make available, in the main, only in electronic format. Consequently, our User Engagement Strategy is underpinned by the following dissemination policy which is designed to make our products and services equally available to all. It is built on the following principles:

Scope – where practicable and appropriate, we will arrange to expand the scope of the Department's official statistics to include data derived from our own administrative and management systems. We will also aim to expand the range of our statistics which are fully compliant with the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics* and thus eligible for formal designation as 'National Statistics'.

Transparency - we will maintain and publish a 'Statistical Catalogue' on the Department's website which lists each of our statistical collections, products and services; their availability; their frequency, their status ('National'; 'Official'; 'Experimental'); their geospatial coverage; and the telephone enquiry point for each.

Electronic publication - we will maintain a corporate 'Statistics' area on the Department's website which will direct users to a range of supporting subject-matter areas dedicated to the dissemination of official statistics. Users will be able to download statistical releases from these subject-matter areas which incorporate commentary on, and summaries of, all our statistics as well as links to supporting tables which contain more disaggregated statistics. A link to our website will be available on the UK Statistics Authority's 'Publication Hub' (*To view, click on the link below*):

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html>

Hardcopy publication – we will publish paper publications only where there is a statutory requirement to do so (e.g. Command Papers) or where we consider that there is a strong and justifiable demand for such a service, and where resources permit.

Pricing - except in the case of hardcopy publications printed on our behalf by the Stationery Office (TSO), we will publish all of our statistical products free of charge on the internet. We may impose a discretionary charge if a request for additional data requires us to implement costly processing and security measures.

Granularity - subject to confidentiality constraints, and quality considerations, we will publish our statistics down to the lowest possible level of geographical disaggregation, using the standard geospatial boundaries adopted and promoted by the Government Statistical Service.

Commentary and documentation - all of our statistical products and services will be accompanied by commentary designed to help users understand and make effective use of our statistics. We will also provide users with information about the way the underlying data are collected; the methodology which underpins the statistics; and their quality.

Revisions – we will handle revisions to our published statistics - whether they be scheduled revisions, or unscheduled corrections (i.e. resulting from errors) – in

accordance with the arrangements described in our separate Revisions Policy (*To view, click on the link below*):

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

Accessibility – we will pre-announce all of our statistical releases on our own website and also in the Release Calendar which is published on the UK Statistics Authority's Publication Hub (*To view the latter, click on the link below*).

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html>

Availability - where appropriate, and in accordance with any legal, contractual, or data security constraints, we will provide bona-fide applicants with access to anonymised micro data so that they can undertake their own secondary analysis and research. The UK Data Archive will be a key gateway for providing such access.

Preservation - we will archive, via the UK Data Archive (UKDA), material likely to be of historical interest, or essential to the analysis of time-series – subject to considerations of security, confidentiality, statutory obligations and cost.

Governance and administration

Management

One of our senior managers will adopt the role of **User Champion** with the remit to promote users interests in the management and development of the Department's statistics. Part of their job is to ensure that 'User Needs' occupy a prominent place in the management of our statistical agenda, and to coordinate all the Department's activities which are targeted at statistics users. They will also monitor the degree to which the Department's statisticians meet the aspirations set out in this strategy and initiate action where it becomes apparent that we have fallen short of the user engagement standards we have set ourselves.

Statistical planning

We will publish, on a regular basis, a 'Statistical Plan' which will inform users about our future publication plans and which will be constructed in the context of the Department's overall 'Business Plan'. Our Plan will be informed by each of the User Engagement activities described above and will, itself, be the subject of a formal public consultation.

Stewardship

We will produce an annual report which will record progress against our Statistical Plan and summarise any feedback we have received about the extent to which we have met our users' needs.

Customer service standard

We will endeavour to be as approachable and as helpful as we can, and we will aim to provide a satisfactory level of service by delivering a regular portfolio of statistical products and services that are timely, relevant and fit for purpose.

We recognise, however, that things can sometimes go wrong. We may, for instance, make mistakes when producing or publishing our statistics, or we may fall short of our own delivery or service standards. In such circumstances, we will welcome constructive comments, criticism, and complaints because they will help us to improve our customer service. In the event that things do go wrong, we will apologise and do everything we can to put things right.

We will support and publicise the following customer contact points to field any enquiries or complaints from customers - whether submitted by phone, letter or e-mail - which have not already been directed to a known contact; to a specific business area; or to the Department's generic enquiry point.

Contact details:

E-Mail: StatShop@communities.gsi.gov.uk

Telephone: 030 3444 4193

Links to supporting annexes

- [Annex 1 - Local Government Finance](#)
- [Annex 2 - Housing and Homelessness](#)
- [Annex 3 - Planning Performance and Land Use](#)
- [Annex 4 - Communities and Citizens](#)
- [Annex 5 - Fire and Rescue](#)
- [Annex 6 - Deprivation](#)