

BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

A breach of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics occurs where one or more provisions of the Code were not followed in situations where an exemption or exception had not been approved by the UK Statistics Authority's Head of Assessment, as required in paragraph (xii) of the Code's preamble. Rules on pre-release access to statistics are covered in the relevant Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Orders; the Code applies as if it includes these orders.

1 Background Information

Name of Statistical Output

Mortgage Rescue Scheme Monitoring Statistics

Name of Producer Organisation

Communities and Local Government (CLG)

Name and contact details of person submitting this report, and date of report

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2 Circumstances of Breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice(s)

Protocol 2: Release practices
Practice 8: Ensure that no indication of the substance of a statistical report is made public, or given to the media or any other party not recorded as eligible for access before publication. Report to the National Statistician immediately any accidental or wrongful release, and investigate the circumstances.

Date of occurrence

16th March 2010

Nature of breach (including links with previous breaches, if any)

On 16th March 2010 the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) circulated a press release, on the number of housing associations who had signed up to deliver mortgage rescue, to specialist press. The release also contained one figure showing the number of households in financial difficulty that the Mortgage Rescue Scheme has supported. The press release was sent to about 20 specialist press contacts, but was not published on the HCA website.

The figure was taken from HCA owned management information, but could have been seen as pre-empting an official statistic due to be released on 13th May by

Communities and Local Government (CLG) on Mortgage Rescue Scheme Monitoring Statistics.

The CLG statistics are not derived from the HCA management information, but from data collected from local authorities and extracted from the fast-track case management system. However both the HCA management information on completed mortgage rescues and the CLG data on households accepting an offer through the scheme are derived from information from Registered Social Landlords, and will be similar apart from some timing differences. The HCA management information is used by CLG in the quality assurance of the quarterly official statistics.

CLG policy officials were aware that a press notice was forthcoming and the CLG press office was sent a copy of the press release the day before it was issued, but it had not been seen by CLG policy officials or statisticians.

Reasons for breach

Whilst HCA officials in this delivery area fully appreciate the HCA's responsibilities under the code of practice for the publication of official statistics, the figure quoted in the release is not classified as an official HCA statistic and the HCA officials were unaware that this was likely to be very similar to a figure that will be published as an official statistic by CLG in May.

3 Reactions and Impact

The error was spotted by CLG officials who were sent a copy of the press release at the time it was issued. The CLG Head of Profession and the HCA were informed. The Head of Profession's office notified the National Statistician's office the same afternoon, and the HCA immediately issued a correction, quoting the latest published figure (four hours after the original release). At the time of submitting this report, the figure released has not been further reported by specialist press that received it.

4 Corrective Actions Taken (include short-term actions, and long-term changes made to procedures)

The CLG Head of Profession will write to the HCA explaining their responsibilities under the Code of Practice. CLG and HCA officials are meeting shortly to agree procedures and ensure that these are communicated and guidance provided to all relevant officials. This will include identifying with the HCA other breach risks when using similar shared data sets. This identification will enable HCA officials to put in place an additional cross-check before such releases are made.

5 Link to published statements about this breach

None

6 Any other relevant supporting material

None