

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Household Estimates and Projections in Scotland

(produced by the National Records of Scotland)

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About the UK Statistics Authority

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*.

Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the *Code of Practice*. The *Code* is wide-ranging. Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

Designation as National Statistics should not be interpreted to mean that the statistics are always correct. For example, whilst the *Code* requires statistics to be produced to a level of accuracy that meets users' needs, it also recognises that errors can occur – in which case it requires them to be corrected and publicised.

Assessment Reports will not normally comment further on a set of statistics, for example on their validity as social or economic measures. However, Reports may point to such questions if the Authority believes that further research would be desirable.

Assessment Reports typically provide an overview of any noteworthy features of the methods used to produce the statistics, and will highlight substantial concerns about quality. Assessment Reports also describe aspects of the ways in which the producer addresses the 'sound methods and assured quality' principle of the *Code*, but do not themselves constitute a review of the methods used to produce the statistics. However the *Code* requires producers to "seek to achieve continuous improvement in statistical processes by, for example, undertaking regular reviews".

The Authority may grant designation on condition that the producer body takes steps, within a stated timeframe, to fully meet the *Code's* requirements. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the *Code*.

The Authority grants designation on the basis of three main sources of information:

- i. factual evidence and assurances by senior statisticians in the producer body;
- ii. the views of users who we contact, or who contact us, and;
- iii. our own review activity.

Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, it may withdraw the Assessment Report and revise it as necessary.

It is a statutory requirement on the producer body to ensure that it continues to produce the set of statistics designated as National Statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

Contents

Section 1: Summary of findings

Section 2: Subject of the assessment

Section 3: Assessment findings

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

Annex 2: Summary of the assessment process and user views

1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*³. The report covers sets of National Statistics that are released by the National Records of Scotland (NRS)⁴ in the following statistical releases:

- *Estimates of Households and Dwellings in Scotland*⁵ (including small area statistics); and
- *Household Projections for Scotland*⁶.

1.1.2 The *Statistics and Registration Service Act* also allows Ministers to request an assessment of other official statistics in order for them to gain National Statistics status. This report also covers *Household Projections for Scotland's Strategic Development Plan (SDP) Areas and National Parks*⁷ in response to such a request.

1.1.3 This report was prepared by the Authority's Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics listed in paragraph 1.1.1 are designated as National Statistics and has determined that the statistics detailed in 1.1.2 can be designated as National Statistics, subject to NRS implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by August 2011.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 NRS engages effectively with users through a range of statistical planning committees, working groups and seminars. NRS publishes users' needs in minutes from meetings and has recently consulted users to seek their views about the demographic statistical work programme for 2011/12.

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

² http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

⁴ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/>

⁵ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/households/estimates/index.html>

⁶ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/households/projections/index.html>

⁷ See footnote 6

- 1.3.2 NRS produces housing estimates and projections for different geographies which have been requested by users. NRS makes extensive use of administrative systems in producing these statistics.
- 1.3.3 NRS only provides limited information about the operational and policy context to accompany the release of these statistics. NRS could also provide more information on the accuracy and quality of these statistics.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the National Records of Scotland could strengthen its compliance with the *Code*. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

Requirement 1	Provide more information about how the household estimates for Scotland compare with the equivalent statistics for the other countries in the UK, including the impact of the different methods on the comparability of the statistics (para 3.13)
Requirement 2	Improve the accessibility of the information about the quality of these statistics in relation to the potential range of uses (para 3.26)
Requirement 3	Provide more detailed commentary and analysis in the releases that aid interpretation, including factual information about the policy or operational context of the statistics (para 3.27)

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 The National Records for Scotland (NRS) produces a range of statistics that provide information about Scotland's population. On 1 April 2011, the General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) merged with the National Archives for Scotland to become the National Records for Scotland (NRS)⁸. The Household Estimates Branch is responsible for producing statistics on households and dwellings⁹ in Scotland, which are the subject of this assessment.
- 2.2 Household estimates and projections at Scotland and local authority level have previously been produced by the Scottish Office and the Scottish Government. In October 2004, GROS took over responsibility for producing household estimates and projections from the Scottish Government. This move aimed to increase the coordination between population and household statistics, and enable the development of statistics for small areas.
- 2.3 NRS publishes *Estimates of Households and Dwellings in Scotland* annually. The release presents estimates of the number of households and dwellings in Scotland and for each local authority area using the CTAXBASE¹⁰ return supplied by local authorities to the Scottish Government and the Scottish Assessors' Association Portal¹¹. The Scottish Assessors' Association's Portal includes public data on the Rateable Values and Council Tax bands for all properties in Scotland. NRS has also developed small area statistics, based on information held on local authority council tax billing systems. NRS publishes analyses of these results with the household estimates at local authority level, and these are released on the Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics¹² (SNS) website. The Small Area Household Estimates were first released in 2008 and included data from 2007.
- 2.4 NRS also publishes two-yearly releases presenting household projections for Scotland, and projections for Scotland's Strategic Development Plan (SDP) Areas and National Parks:
- *Household Projections for Scotland*: The most recent release provides projections up to 2033, based on the mid-2008 population estimates. The release also contains two additional projections for different (high and low) migration assumptions.

⁸ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2011/03/10144001>

⁹ A 'dwelling' refers to the accommodation itself, for example a house or a flat. A 'household' refers to the people living in that dwelling. The number of households will be smaller than the number of dwellings, as these include vacant or second homes.

¹⁰ The CTAXBASE figures give the number of properties in each council tax band for each local authority area, including those with exemption and discount. They are used in the calculation of Grant Aided Expenditure for local authorities.

¹¹ <http://www.saa.gov.uk/>

¹² Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (SNS) is the Scottish Government's ongoing programme to improve the accessibility, consistency and availability of small area statistics at data-zone level in Scotland. A data-zone is a standard geography used by the Scottish Government containing an average of 750 people. <http://www.sns.gov.uk/>

- *Household Projections for Scotland's Strategic Development Plan (SDP) Areas and National Parks*: The latest release includes projections up to 2033, also based on the mid-2008 population estimates. NRS publishes additional projections¹³ around six weeks after the main release, presenting projections for these areas based on different (high and low) migration assumptions.

2.5 The main use of the statistics is to inform local authority (and other planning authority) decisions on future housing need and the provision of services, such as health and education. The statistics are also used for a variety of other purposes, including:

- research on housing and planning issues, particularly in relation to changing demographics, by consultants and academics;
- informing business planning by the construction industry;
- forecasting council tax income by local authorities; and
- forecasting revenue and planning for future demand by utility companies.

These statistics have been used recently as part of the population indicators developed for the 'Glasgow Indicators Project' by the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) on its 'Understanding Glasgow' website¹⁴.

2.6 The household estimates and projections are based mostly on administrative sources. The primary source of data is the CTAXBASE¹⁵, managed by the Scottish Government and the Council Tax billing system managed by local authorities. Data are provided by Scotland's 32 local authorities to the Scottish Government using CTAXBASE to inform local planning and Grant Aided Expenditure (GAE). NRS is also provided with aggregated data extracts from local authorities' Council Tax billing systems which contain lower level geographical data needed to produce the small area statistics. The statistics for communal establishments are based on a range of existing information from Scottish Government and the Information Services Division of NHS National Services Scotland (ISD), such as prisons, schools and care home collections.

2.7 NRS recently consulted users to seek their views about its demographic statistical work programme for 2011/12. The consultation ran from 1 December 2010 to 9 February 2011. A summary of the responses¹⁶ is available on NRS's website.

2.8 NRS told us that the production of the household estimates and projections releases is included in the overall branch profile which accounts for approximately 3.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff, at a cost of about £150,000 per year.

¹³ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/households/projections/variant-proj-sdp-np-08based.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.understandingglasgow.com/indicators/population/overview>

¹⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Local-Government-Finance/ReturnCTAXBASE>

¹⁶ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files2/stats/consultation-groups/stats-consultation-analysis-report.pdf>

3 Assessment findings

Principle 1: Meeting user needs

The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public.

3.1 NRS engages with users through a variety of channels:

- the Household Analysis Review Group¹⁷ (HARG) which consists of representatives from local authorities, other government departments, and NRS statisticians. The group meets to discuss methods for producing household estimates and projections for Scotland. HARG is a subgroup of the Population and Migration Statistics (PAMS) committee¹⁸, which includes representatives from Scottish Government, local authorities, academics, ISD and the Office for National Statistics. NRS consults PAMS about the development, production and dissemination of population and other demographic statistics; and
- the Demography Analytical Working Group (DAWG), which aims to raise awareness about demographic issues between NRS, the Scottish Government and Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) analysts.

3.2 NRS also interacts with users by organising workshops for local authorities to disseminate and access its statistics. NRS uses the ScotStat¹⁹ network to disseminate information about the statistics and told us that it actively takes part in ScotStat consultation events and conferences relating to household estimates and projections. These varied user engagement activities capture the views of a range of users from local and central government, which we consider as good practice.

3.3 The needs and experiences of users are well documented in the minutes and papers of HARG meetings and other working groups. NRS consulted users to seek their views about its demographic statistical work programme for 2011/12. A summary of the responses²⁰ is available on NRS's website. NRS statisticians told us that they will use the responses from this consultation to review the range of users and uses of all their outputs with a view to including users from other sectors in its working groups.

3.4 NRS carried out a customer survey in 2007²¹, which led to a reorganisation of its website to increase the accessibility of its statistics.

¹⁷ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/user-consultation-groups-seminars/harg/index.html>

¹⁸ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/user-consultation-groups-seminars/index.html>

¹⁹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/scotstat>

²⁰ http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files2/stats/consultation-groups/Stats-Consultation_Analysis_Report.pdf

²¹ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/user-consultation-groups-seminars/customer-survey-07.html>

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

Official statistics, and information about statistical processes, should be managed impartially and objectively.

- 3.5 The household estimates and projections statistics are presented impartially and objectively and are published in an orderly manner. NRS states on its website that it follows the Scottish Government's revisions policy²² and publishes a list of all revisions and corrections to these statistics²³, with links to the relevant releases. The releases themselves also highlight any revisions and corrections.
- 3.6 NRS recently made a correction to *Estimates of Households and Dwellings in Scotland, 2009*²⁴. NRS included an explanation of the corrections on the product webpage and in the revised release.
- 3.7 Changes to the methods used to produce the statistics are usually discussed at one of the working groups or committees, and the details are available in the published papers and minutes of the meetings. In 2004 NRS introduced a major change in the methods it used to produce household estimates, moving from using Census data and changes in housing stock levels to using council tax billing data. NRS included some explanation of the change to the council tax billing system in *Estimates of Households and Dwellings in Scotland 2004*²⁵ and consulted HARG and local authorities about this change.

²² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/CPSONRevisionsCorrections/Q/EditMode/on/ForceUpdate/on>

²³ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/about/revisions-corrections.html>

²⁴ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/households/estimates/household-estimates-2009/index.html>

²⁵ [http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/households/estimates/household-estimates-for-scotland-2004/background-info.html#Background%20info%20II\(I\)](http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/households/estimates/household-estimates-for-scotland-2004/background-info.html#Background%20info%20II(I))

Principle 3: Integrity

At all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.

- 3.8 No incidents of political pressure, abuse of trust or complaints relating to professional integrity, quality or standards were reported to or identified by the Assessment team. NRS told us that it takes an open approach to developing and communicating these statistics, with active and transparent user engagement, helps the organisation to maintain its integrity.
- 3.9 NRS participated in seminars, jointly with the Scottish Government, in June and October 2009 to discuss issues of integrity and the *Code of Practice*. NRS told us that the production and presentation of statistics are managed solely by NRS statisticians.

Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.

- 3.10 NRS provides basic commentary about the quality and reliability of the outputs being assessed in short 'About this Publication' documents available on its website to support the relevant releases. A brief explanation is presented for each output with summary information on the different aspects of the European Statistical System²⁶ definition of quality. The Assessment team regard these documents as good practice; they are useful for summarising basic quality information for users. These documents provide links to where more detail can be found. NRS publishes further information about the methods used to compile the statistics within the releases. The latest *Household Estimates for Scotland* release provides a link to more detailed description of the methods and sources used, and information about the council tax billing system in particular, is provided in the publication, *Household Estimates for Scotland, 1991 - 2004*²⁷.
- 3.11 In 2001, the then Scottish Executive consulted about using existing council tax systems to produce household estimates and dwelling counts at local authority level in Scotland²⁸. A further review of the methods was conducted by NRS in 2004-05 in conjunction with local authorities and other users. NRS concluded that future estimates should be based on the council tax system as this would provide more timely information. NRS changed the methods for the 2004-based estimates and discussed the change in the release²⁹. The change resulted in some quality improvements to the data collection. Methods for small area statistics required further changes, including a change in legislation³⁰ to allow data sharing.
- 3.12 An analysis of the accuracy of the household projections methods was presented in the 2002 *Household Projections* release³¹. This compared the 2000-based projections with the 2002-based estimates. Similar comparisons to review the accuracy of the methods were conducted in 2005³² and 2007³³, and were discussed at HARG. NRS told the Assessment team that further evaluation of the effectiveness of the methods used for household estimates and projections would be informed by the 2011 Census and that it planned to include this work in its statistics plan. We suggest that NRS improve the

²⁶ The six dimensions of the ESS Quality Framework are: relevance, accuracy, timeliness and punctuality, accessibility and clarity, comparability, and coherence.

²⁷ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/households/estimates/household-estimates-for-scotland-2004/index.html>

²⁸ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files/harg0007665.pdf>

²⁹ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/households/estimates/household-estimates-for-scotland-2004/background-info.html>

³⁰ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2003/147/introduction/made>

³¹ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files/hp-2002-statistical-bulletin.pdf>

³² [http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files1/stats/harg2007\(6\)-household-projections-comparisons-with-census-data.pdf](http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files1/stats/harg2007(6)-household-projections-comparisons-with-census-data.pdf)

³³ [http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files1/stats/harg2007\(6\)-annex.pdf](http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files1/stats/harg2007(6)-annex.pdf)

accessibility of the information on the accuracy of the statistics by providing summaries or links to papers presented to HARG with the *Household Projections* release.

- 3.13 NRS engages with the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), the Welsh Assembly Government and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) to ensure that household statistics are comparable across the UK where possible. However there are exceptions as Scotland is the only UK country to produce its household estimates using the administrative council tax data, as described above. NRS provides links to a technical guide³⁴ hosted by the Welsh Assembly Government on the differences in the methods used to produce household projections in the different countries of the UK. As part of the designation as National Statistics, NRS should provide more information on how the household estimates for Scotland compare with the equivalent statistics for the other countries in the UK, including the impact of the different methods on the comparability of the statistics³⁵ (Requirement 1). We suggest that NRS work with DCLG, the Welsh Assembly Government and NISRA to achieve this.
- 3.14 Current household projections are trend-based; they do not take into account future changes in social and economic factors that may influence the formation of households. NRS explains these issues in the release. NRS is sponsoring PhD research with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) into whether it is possible to refine the current methods by incorporating information about social trends, such as trends in social class derived from survey data, into the projections to improve their accuracy. NRS provides a link to this work on its website³⁶, and presented a paper to HARG in March 2011³⁷, discussing the incorporation of survey data into the household estimates and projections. The Assessment team regards this as an example of good practice in seeking to achieve improvements in statistical processes. We suggest that NRS publish plans for incorporating this research into its existing methods, and involve users in this development work.
- 3.15 NRS carries out regular quality assurance checks, such as comparing small-area household estimates produced from the council tax billing system with local authority figures from CTAXBASE forms to check for consistency. NRS told the Assessment team that the biggest issue facing the quality of the household estimates at small area level and the statistics on numbers of dwellings is the quality of the postcode data on the administrative systems; it is believed that the data on the CTAXBASE is more accurate. NRS has procedures in place for the quality assuring postcode-level data. NRS told us that it provides staff training and desk instructions to ensure that statisticians are suitably trained in quality management.

³⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/technicalreport/?lang=en>

³⁵ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 6 and Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

³⁶ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files2/stats/household-projections/projecting-scotlands-households.pdf>

³⁷ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files2/stats/consultation-groups/harg2010-paper4.pdf>

3.16 NRS follows the Scottish Government's 'Guide to Basic Quality Assurance in Statistics' and a link is available on its website³⁸. The Scottish Government is currently developing more detailed quality guideline procedures³⁹.

³⁸ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/about/national-and-official/index.html>

³⁹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/NatStats>

Principle 5: Confidentiality

Private information about individual persons (including bodies corporate) compiled in the production of official statistics is confidential, and should be used for statistical purposes only.

- 3.17 NRS has published a confidentiality policy⁴⁰ that outlines the steps the organisation takes to protect confidential information. The policy outlines the arrangements put in place to protect the security of NRS data, such as secure data storage and staff training. In this document, NRS also outlines how it benefits users by extending microdata access to authorised third parties.
- 3.18 NRS receives detailed data on communal establishments, which often contain residents belonging to sensitive and vulnerable groups, such as looked after children and the elderly. NRS only receives the age and gender profiles of those resident in particular communal establishments. NRS statisticians told us that they apply the necessary statistical disclosure control techniques to ensure that confidentiality is protected.

⁴⁰ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files1/stats/data-access-and-confidentiality.pdf>

Principle 6: Proportionate burden

The cost burden on data suppliers should not be excessive and should be assessed relative to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.

- 3.19 The household estimates and projections statistics are based mainly on data from administrative sources. The primary administrative source used is the council tax billing system and Scottish Assessors' Association Portal.
- 3.20 NRS has a team responsible for investigating the potential use of alternative sources in the production of the population and household estimates. The 'Alternative Sources Branch' aims to develop knowledge of administrative systems and to establish possibilities for data linkage, which can then feed into the production of the demographic outputs.
- 3.21 To produce the small area statistics, NRS consulted with local authorities in 2005 to analyse the extra burden of providing data zone level information on households based on the council tax billing system (see paragraph 2.3 and 3.11). Following the consultation and agreement of local authorities, NRS now publishes statistics at data zone level through the Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (SNS) website⁴¹. NRS also meets some of the costs involved in providing the additional data zone level information to reduce the cost burden on local councils.

⁴¹ www.sns.gov.uk

Principle 7: Resources

The resources made available for statistical activities should be sufficient to meet the requirements of this Code and should be used efficiently and effectively.

- 3.22 NRS told us that it has sufficient resources to produce these statistics to the standards of the *Code*.
- 3.23 NRS has consulted its users on the future demographic statistics work programme in order to identify possible savings, and published a summary of the results on its website (see paragraph 2.7).
- 3.24 NRS publishes its statistical planning arrangements⁴² which include details of deliverables, staff resources and costs. They also include guidance for producer teams on statistical planning.
- 3.25 NRS has adopted the Scottish Government's recruitment and continuing professional development procedures. This includes well-established procedures for recruiting staff and a dedicated training and development intranet for statistical staff that includes a competence framework and provides learning and development opportunities.

⁴² <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/about/what-we-do/stats-plan/index.html>

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

Official statistics, accompanied by full and frank commentary, should be readily accessible to all users.

- 3.26 NRS publishes basic metadata for the household estimates and projections within the releases and in the supporting 'About this Publication' documents (see paragraph 3.10). There is scope to improve the information about data quality that is presented with the statistics, particularly in relation to the range of potential uses. As part of the designation as National Statistics, NRS should improve the accessibility of the information about the quality of these statistics in relation to the potential range of uses⁴³ (Requirement 2). For example, NRS could provide summaries or links to papers on quality issues presented to HARG and PAMS.
- 3.27 The releases contain some commentary but little context or factual information to aid users' interpretation. For example, the 2009 *Household Estimates* release mentions that the increase between 2008 and 2009 was the smallest recorded in the five-year period but provides no wider context or explanation of this. As part of the designation as National Statistics, NRS should provide more commentary that aids interpretation, including factual information about the policy or operational context⁴⁴ (Requirement 3). The Authority has produced two statements on the 'standards for statistical releases'⁴⁵ and 'the value of statistical commentary'⁴⁶ which provide additional guidance on the Authority's view on what constitutes a 'good statistical release'.
- 3.28 The releases include some graphical presentation, such as charts and maps which aid the interpretation of the statistics. The household estimates at small area level are released in tables on the SNS website. NRS includes some analysis and description of the small area level statistics in the *Estimates of Households and Dwellings* release.
- 3.29 NRS's website provides a short overview of each release to help users understand the information included in the main release. In addition, NRS also publishes summary statistics⁴⁷ on households and housing on its website along with links to the relevant statistical releases. Users who responded to the survey carried out as part of this Assessment were complimentary about the Council Area Profiles⁴⁸ available on NRS's website – these present information on population, vital events and households for each of Scotland's 32 council areas.
- 3.30 NRS does not have a policy to ensure that official statistics are archived appropriately. We suggest that NRS collaborate with Scottish Government colleagues who are working with the National Library for Scotland to ensure that official statistics are appropriately archived.

⁴³ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

⁴⁴ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

⁴⁵ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-releases.html>

⁴⁶ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/the-value-of-statistical-commentary.html>

⁴⁷ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files2/stats/high-level-summary/j11198/j1119818.htm>

⁴⁸ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/at-a-glance/council-areas-map/index.html>

Protocol 1: User engagement

Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value. This Protocol draws together the relevant practices set out elsewhere in the Code and expands on the requirements in relation to consultation.

3.31 The requirements for this Protocol are covered elsewhere in this report.

Protocol 2: Release practices

Statistical reports should be released into the public domain in an orderly manner that promotes public confidence and gives equal access to all, subject to relevant legislation.

- 3.32 NRS publishes the forthcoming release dates for these statistics on its website, and the statistics can be accessed via the National Statistics Publication Hub.
- 3.33 NRS provides pre-release access to its Household Estimates and Projections statistics in accordance with *The Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Order (2008)*⁴⁹. NRS does not publish a record of those who are granted pre-release access. We suggest that NRS publish a record of those who have pre-release access to these statistics in their final form.

⁴⁹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2008/399/schedule/paragraph/2/made?page=5>

Protocol 3: The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes

Administrative sources should be fully exploited for statistical purposes, subject to adherence to appropriate safeguards.

- 3.34 NRS has published a Statement of Administrative Sources⁵⁰, covering the sources used in its household estimates and projections statistics. However, the Statement could include more detailed information about the arrangements for auditing the quality of the administrative systems NRS uses. NRS told us that the use of administrative sources is discussed at user meetings and other advisory groups, to help determine which sources are most suitable and to discuss quality issues. We suggest that NRS improve the availability of information about the quality of the administrative sources, and in particular how it determined that each source was of sufficient quality for the intended use.
- 3.35 Through the work of its Alternative Sources Branch, NRS takes a proactive approach to identifying and using new administrative sources. We regard this as good practice.

⁵⁰ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files2/stats/about/statement-of-admin-sources.pdf>

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the household estimates and projections statistics, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

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|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Suggestion 1 | Improve the accessibility of the information on the accuracy of the statistics by providing summaries or links to papers presented to HARG with the <i>Household Projections</i> release (para 3.12) |
| Suggestion 2 | Work with DCLG, the Welsh Assembly Government and NISRA to provide information on the comparability of the statistics across the UK (para 3.13) |
| Suggestion 3 | Publish plans for incorporating the sponsored research for improving household projections into existing methods and involve users in this development work (para 3.14) |
| Suggestion 4 | Collaborate with Scottish Government colleagues who are working with the National Library for Scotland to ensure that official statistics are appropriately archived (para 3.30) |
| Suggestion 5 | Publish lists of those who have pre-release access to each output (para 3.33) |
| Suggestion 6 | Improve the availability of information about the quality of the administrative sources (para 3.34) |

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

- A2.1 This assessment was conducted from October 2010 to April 2011.
- A2.2 The Assessment team – Kim Reimann and David Duncan-Fraser – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of NRS in October 2010. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 16 November 2010. The Assessment team subsequently met the NRS team during January 2011 to review compliance with the *Code of Practice*, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

- A2.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare assessment reports.
- A2.4 The Assessment team received 9 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:
- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Local authority | 5 |
| Scottish Government | 2 |
| Other government department | 1 |
| Public utilities | 1 |
- A2.5 Users were highly complimentary about NRS' user consultation, particularly through HARG and PAMS and other working groups that NRS leads; good engagement and responsiveness was a common theme of the replies we received. The statistics appear to be used extensively by local authorities, but users commented on a lack of information on quality and uses. Users noted that the organisation of NRS's statistics website could have been better. The Assessment team notes that NRS has since reviewed its website and has received some positive responses from users.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

