

## BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

This document reports a breach of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, or the relevant Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Orders, to which the Code applies as if it included these orders.

*All breach reports are published on the UK Statistics Authority's website and need to explain (clearly and concisely) what happened to cause the breach and what is being/has been done by the statistical Head of Profession (HoP) to ensure the risk of recurrence is minimised.*

### 1. Background information

Name of Statistical Output (including weblink to the relevant output or 'landing page')

- *Crime in England and Wales, Year ending June 2013 – this is a National Statistics output*  
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/period-ending-june-2013/stb-crime-in-england-and-wales--year-ending-june-2013.html>

Name of Producer Organisation

Office for National Statistics (ONS)

Name and contact details of the statistical Head of Profession (Lead Official in an Arm's Length Body) submitting this report, and date of report

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### 2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

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

- 16 October 2013

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

- There was a breach of pre-release access on Wednesday evening by the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners (APCC) press office. This is a national association representing Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) and is the successor body to the Association of Police Authorities which ceased to exist when police authorities were abolished and PCCs elected in November (2012).
- The Communications Manager at APCC sent an embargoed press notice to national media contacts on the evening of 16 October in breach of the Code of Practice. The text of the press release can be found at Section 6. The press notice contained information on a number of key headline measures.
- The breach was brought to our attention by the Home Office who had received a call from a journalist querying their receipt of the embargoed press release. The APCC were contacted and they withdrew the press notice. The APCC were very apologetic and explained that it was sent due to a misunderstanding rather than with deliberate intent of breaching pre-release access rules.
- Fortunately none of the national media contacts who received the material published any of the findings before 9.30am on the 17 October.
- The APCC predecessor body (the Association of Police Authorities) previously committed a similar breach in April 2011 and this was reported by the then Head of Profession for these statistics, David Blunt in the Home Office, to the Statistics Authority. See link below:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/breach-reports/crime-in-england-and-wales--quarterly-update-to-december-2010.pdf>

#### Reasons for breach

- The press team at the APCC did not understand that the Code of Practice does not permit an embargoed press release to be issued to the media before the release of the statistics.

### **3. Reactions and impact (both within the producer body and outside)**

- There was no impact as media contacts did not publish the APCC statement or make reference to the findings before the statistics were released at 9.30am on 17 October. However, this had the potential to cause significant reputational damage to the statistics and to ONS.

#### **4. Corrective actions taken to prevent reoccurrence of such a breach (include short-term actions, and long-term changes made to procedures)**

- This is in effect a repeat offence, as the APA, were previously warned that a future breach may result in the removal of pre-release access. The issuing of a proactive press notice also demonstrates an abuse of pre-release access which is intended solely to allow briefing of those who may need to respond to media questions about the statistics at the time of their release.
- ONS will write to the APCC to inform them that pre-release access to ONS releases has been removed with immediate effect.
- This incident also demonstrates the increased risk of such breaches from having a large number of people granted pre-release access and, as part of a wider review that is being undertaken by ONS, we will seek to minimise the list for future releases.

#### **5. Any other relevant supporting material**

##### **Media release issued under embargo by APCC**

##### **PCCs welcome drop in crime but call for more support for victims of sexual offences**

Today's data from the Independent Office of National Statistics shows a 5 per cent decrease in overall crime compared with last year and continues the downward trend seen in recent years.

Recorded crime has dropped to 3.7 million offences - the lowest levels since 2002/03.

Although the overall statistics are good news, the number of sexual offences recorded by the police last year showed a 9 per cent increase.

Responding to these statistics, Tony Lloyd, Chairman of the APCC Board and Greater Manchester PCC said; "Overall recorded crime is down to record low levels which will be welcome news to local communities. Congratulations must go to the police and partner agencies who continue to work together to reduce crime year-on-year.

I am concerned however about the increase in sexual offences. Although some of the recorded increase is related to historical cases this is a worrying trend and which must be addressed. There is also a need to offer greater support to the victims of sexual offences.

Police and Crime Commissioners are very supportive of their local Sexual Assault Referral Centres and other local support services which continue to play an important role in supporting victims. We must also work to encourage greater co-ordination between support groups and the police to ensure that victims feel confident to speak out." ENDS