

REPORT OF A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR STATISTICS



1. Core Information

Title and link to statistical output	Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH) historical series: 1988 to 2004 https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/cpihhistoricalseries1988to2004
Name of producer organisation	Office for National Statistics
Name and contact details of person dealing with report	Debra Prestwood Statistical Head of Profession, Office for National Statistics, Government Buildings, Cardiff Road, Newport, NP10 8XG.
Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)	
Date of breach report	07/12/2018

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant principle(s) and practice(s)	Principle 3: Orderly release Practice 6: Statistics should be released to all users at 9.30am on a weekday.
Date of occurrence of breach	07/12/2018
<p>Live Service Access to the ONS website failed at approximately 02:00. This was triggered by an automated renewal of the certificates which allow the various services of the website to validate and communicate with each other. The Development team immediately begun investigations when made aware at 07:00. By 07:36 the Development team made the decision to switch to the back-up service, which ensured users were able to access a limited version of the ONS website. The live service was restored and access switched back from the back-up site at 09:23.</p> <p>Alerts to flag Website issues, API, preview site and publishing system all worked within a reasonable trigger time and from this the Development team responded quickly. However, they encountered difficulties establishing remote access to the production environment and connecting to machines. Also, a number of errors were not reported, where they were expected on the dashboard. The lack of an out of hours on-call service resulted in the long outage period.</p> <p>CPIH Time Series publication When the Live service resumed, there were 7 minutes until scheduled publishing time of 09:30. The team then encountered a failure in the publishing system, resulting in the failure to publish the CPIH historical series 1988 – 2004. Investigations suggest the likely cause was an error in the approval process, which makes a publication available on the website, but that the error was not logged. As a result, the content to be published was stuck in progress, but the publishing system was not reporting a problem. Without the specific error, the root cause cannot be identified. Additional logging has already been added to catch similar errors in future.</p>	

3. Impact of the breach

The 'CPI including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH) historical series: 1988 to 2004' article was not published and the business area agreed to postpone the release. Based on previous

publications, we estimate that approximately 50 users were affected. No other ONS statistics were impacted.

The failure meant that the publication process needed to be restarted from scratch, with content input and reviewed by publishing and output areas. At a busy time of year, the earliest suitable date for the upload of the CPIH article and data was Friday 14th December. This will be followed on Wednesday 19th December by the time series data.

4. Corrective actions (taken or planned) to prevent re-occurrence

Lessons Learnt

- The Development team plan to add on a simple automated means of granting remote access to the web platform, which will allow them to control when out of office.
- Implemented extra logs before and after approvals, in order to capture and diagnose future errors.
- Created a code change to handle all exceptions (not just a specific list), so in future the error will be caught, logged and will provide relevant information on how to proceed.

Contingency plan

The current contingency plan for Digital Publishing is working. When the live service went down, web traffic was quickly switched to the back-up service to ensure users had access to a limited service.