

Statistics Commission

STATISTICS COMMISSION
BUSINESS PLAN

April 2007 to March 2008

Contents

Introduction

Role

Aims and objectives

Strategic issues

Strategy

Summary of key projects 2007-08

Projects

Values

Annex A: Forecast expenditure 2007-08

Annex B: What the words mean

Introduction

The Statistics Commission is an independent non-statutory public body sponsored by HM Treasury. It operates openly and independently of Ministers and the producers of official statistics. The Commission's functions were initially defined in the *Framework for National Statistics* (June 2000). Its framework for strategic control is set out in the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum.

This plan covers the period April 2007 to March 2008. The Statistics and Registration Service Bill was introduced in Parliament on 21 November 2006 and is following the usual legislative procedures through both Houses before being enacted. Clause 52(b) of this Bill provides for the **cessation of the Commission**. Our current expectation and working assumption is that this will occur in or about March 2008.

Based on this assumption the Commission has planned a programme of work for 2007-08 most of which is concentrated in the first nine months of the year. In the event of any further announcements by Government which impact on this, the business plan will be revised. The current version is maintained on the Commission website www.statscom.org.uk

Role

The role of the Commission, set out in the June 2000 *Framework for National Statistics* (paragraph 4.2.3), is to “give independent, reliable and relevant advice on National Statistics to Ministers and, by so doing, to provide an additional safeguard on the quality and integrity of National Statistics”.

The Government introduced The Statistics and Registration Service Bill in Parliament on 21 November 2006 and it is following the usual legislative process through both Houses before being enacted. The Commission has strongly welcomed the intent of this Bill, to create an independent Board to enhance confidence in government statistics. The Bill will establish a new Statistics Board which will subsume the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and become a non-ministerial department. In effect the Board will replace:

- the statistical functions of the ONS
- the oversight role of Treasury Ministers in relation to ONS functions
- the independent Statistics Commission.

Any new governance arrangements will take some time to implement and bearing in mind the importance of official statistics in influencing decisions across all sectors of society, and the impact of these decisions on the lives of everyone in the United Kingdom, the Statistics Commission will continue with its work until it is wound up.

The Commission interprets its role as being:

to work with all those in the UK who fund, produce or use official statistics, or who are affected by them, to review current practice and:

- **identify the scope for beneficial change and make proposals; and**
- **support present practice where this is found effective and appropriate.**

In the course of its work the Statistics Commission will also seek to learn from the experience of other countries’ statistical systems where this is relevant to the UK.

The Commission’s role is advisory not regulatory. It has no statutory powers to require the supply of information by government departments or to force implementation of its recommendations.

Aims and objectives

The Commission aims to ensure that official statistics can be trusted by, and meet the needs of, decision-makers, other users and the public. We have adopted the following objectives from April 2007:

Objective 1: To develop our understanding of the **needs of users** of official statistics, including Parliament and the public, and to make proposals that will enhance the statistical service they receive.

Objective 2: To consider and advise on the implementation of the Statistics and Registration Service Bill and other aspects of the future **governance of UK official statistics**.

Objective 3: To carry out the Commission's functions impartially and use resources efficiently, effectively and economically.

Strategic issues

Activities in the year ahead will mainly relate to the following issues:

- how best to contribute to dialogue about the implementation of the Statistics and Registration Service Bill
- how to ensure that the proposed arrangements for the future Statistics Board maintain the scrutiny and challenge role that the Statistics Commission has been responsible for under the current system
- how best to maintain an active and productive dialogue with stakeholders through the remainder of the life of the Commission
- how to ensure effective and transparent statistical planning and quality assurance across government to meet the needs of all users (in government and its agencies, in local government, in business, in the not for profit sector, in academia and elsewhere) – in a way that maximises public value and takes full account of the costs and burdens of data collection
- how to ensure that all official statistics are accompanied by frank, easy to understand and genuinely independent commentary and analysis
- how to stimulate improved communication of statistics, and messages drawn from statistics, to key groups of users, including the general public
- how best to use the resources available to the Commission to research and pursue relevant issues.

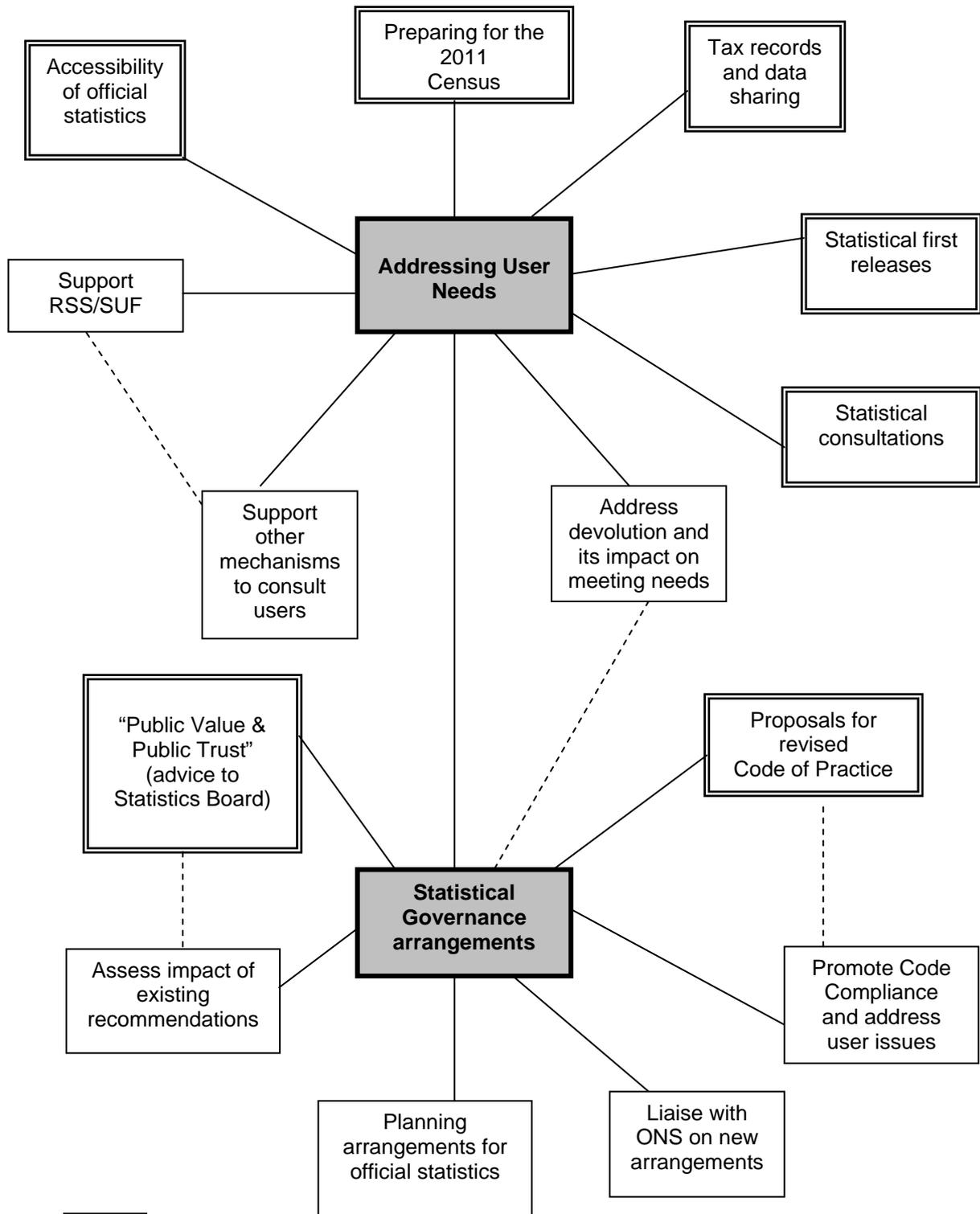
Strategy

Bearing in mind the issues identified above, the current strategy is to:

- propose a revised Code of Practice to the National Statistician and Statistics Board after completing the current public consultation exercise¹
- make proposals to strengthen the non-statutory arrangements for the management of UK official statistics (to the extent that these are not replaced by the statutory framework created by the Statistics and Registration Service Bill)
- pursue, through correspondence and dialogue, the proposals and recommendations that the Commission has made in recent years
- undertake, or commission, research and produce public reports in pursuit of the objectives and strategy in this plan
- support and supplement existing channels of communication between users and producers of official statistics
- facilitate a constructive dialogue, particularly in relation to future governance arrangements, with the Office for National Statistics, Chair of the Statistics Board once appointed, other government departments, the devolved administrations and other public bodies with substantial responsibility for official statistics
- explore issues of concern raised with the Commission on statistical matters, making recommendations where appropriate.

1

Summary of Key Projects 2007-08



 Indicates projects expected to lead to a Commission report in 2007-08.

In undertaking these projects the Commission will carry out its functions impartially and use resources efficiently, effectively and economically (Objective 3). We plan to publish the Statistics Commission Annual Report on 9 July 2007.

Projects

The Commission has a number of projects in train from 2006-07 which will be completed in 2007-08. Some new projects are planned for this year but due to uncertainty surrounding our proposed wind up these plans remain flexible.

Objective 1: To develop our understanding of the needs of users of official statistics, including Parliament and the public, and to make proposals that will enhance the statistical service to they receive.

projects 2007-08

- 1.1 **Preparing for the 2011 Census:** Complete the current review of the planning for the 2011 Census and to look ahead to future challenges and issues. Aim to report spring/summer 2007.
- 1.2 **Accessibility of official statistics:** Complete the current review of data accessibility from a user perspective, examining the provision of adequate metadata, data quality and format. Aim to report spring/summer 2007.
- 1.3 **Review the statistical use of tax data:** Complete the current review of tax data, looking *inter alia* at legal and other restrictions on data sharing. Aim to report by summer 2007.
- 1.4 **Devolution issues:** Further examine the need for better co-ordination of statistical activities between the four administrations following enactment of the Statistics and Registration Service Bill.
- 1.5 **Statistical first releases:** Undertake a review of first releases in the context of government proposals for a central "publication hub". Aim to report autumn 2007.
- 1.6 **Consultation process:** Undertake a review of statistical consultations by government departments. Aim to report autumn 2007.

Objective 2: To consider and advise on the Government's current proposals in relation to the future governance of official statistics.

projects 2007-08

- 2.1 **Legislation:** to advise on the Bill as it proceeds through Parliament; in particular to advise on the role, responsibilities, accountability and constitution of the proposed Statistics Board.
- 2.2 **Public Value and Public Trust :** a report on the work and views of the Commission, to be addressed to the members of the new Statistics Board (summer/autumn 2007).
- 2.3 **Planning arrangements for official statistics:** Undertake a review of the planning arrangements for official statistics across the statistical system. Aim to include recommendations in the report "Public Value and Public Trust".
- 2.4 **Impact assessment:** Assess the impact and future relevance of recommendations in previous Commission reports as a contribution to the report mentioned above.
- 2.5 **Code of Practice:** Make recommendations in relation to the future development of the Code of Practice following consultation in February 2007. Aim to report summer/autumn 2007.

Objective 3: To carry out the Commission's functions impartially using resources efficiently, effectively and economically

projects 2007-08

- 3.1 **Business processes:** Maintain systematic procedures for managing the work of the Commission. This will include regular updates of the Business Plan and individual project plans, and adherence to project management procedures. This includes the establishment of project management boards as appropriate, chaired by a commissioner, for each major project.
- 3.2 **Staff development:** Review and update the training and development framework for all staff to meet both the needs of the Commission and staff.
- 3.3 **Business continuity:** Test disaster recovery procedures and update the Business Continuity Plan accordingly.
- 3.4 **Risk register:** Review and update the risk register once a month to reflect speed of change from progress of legislation.
- 3.5 **Wind up plan:** Regularly update the wind up plan to ensure the Commission is wound up in an efficient manner.

Values

In carrying out its tasks the Commission commits itself:

- to respect and promote all uses of official statistics that are of public value
- to report the results of all its investigations openly and deal systematically with criticism of its work, seeking to learn lessons and continuously improve
- to consult interested parties before the release of Commission findings so as to understand and respond to their views – without shrinking from giving an independent view on controversial issues
- to operate in a transparent way with the minutes of its meetings, correspondence, evidence it receives, and advice it gives, normally made available on the Commission's website
- to present its views in an impartial way.

Forecast Expenditure

	2007-08 £000
Staff costs	525
Accommodation	255
Research*	92
Other current **	241
Capital	0
TOTAL	1,113

* - due to uncertainty about the Commission's wind up date £200k remains unallocated

** - other current includes commissioners' fees, IT maintenance and support, recruitment, training, travel and subsistence, telephones, printing, postage, etc

What the words mean

Integrity: Integrity means that the statistics have been produced in an open and honest way and have not been influenced by any partisan interests – in terms of content, timing or accessibility.

Relevance: In practice, official statistics cannot meet all needs but they should aim to meet the needs of decision-makers across the public and private sectors who depend on those statistics to inform decisions of national importance. In some important cases, ‘decision-makers’ include the general public.

Quality: Many statistics are estimates of unknown quantities, rather than counts. Users need to know how reliable the statistics are so they can judge fitness for purpose. The key component of quality is therefore clarity about reliability. Quality in presentation is also important; the statistics and the messages that can be drawn from the statistics must be presented in a clear, intelligible way.

UK Statistical System: all the people, processes and arrangements that contribute to the management of statistical services in central government and the devolved administrations: this includes Ministers, government departments, the Statistics Commission itself etc. The roles of the various parties in the UK Statistical System are currently set out in the Framework for National Statistics.

Official statistics: the statistical outputs from the ONS and all those National Statistics produced elsewhere in government (now defined formally in the Statistics and Registration Service Bill).

National Statistics: a subset of official statistics, the production of which is, with the agreement of Ministers, subject to the National Statistics Code of Practice and oversight by the National Statistician.

National Statistician: the Director of the Office for National Statistics and Head of the GSS who is also the government’s chief adviser on matters relating to National Statistics.

Government Statistical Service (GSS): the work of all the statistical units in government departments that are co-ordinated through inter-departmental arrangements managed by the Office for National Statistics.

Office for National Statistics (ONS): the central government department that constitutes about half of the Government Statistical Service. It is a department of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Statistics Board: an independent Board to be created by the Statistics and Registration Service Bill, composed of at least six non-executive members, including the Chairman, and three executive members, one of whom will be the National Statistician. The Board will operate at arm’s length from Ministers, with a statutory responsibility for promoting and safeguarding the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics.