

GSS STATISTICAL POLICY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Minutes

Tuesday 18 October 2016

UK Statistics Authority, Drummond Gate, London

Present

David Fry (Chair)

Attendees:

Mike Batley	Health
Pete Brodie	ONS
Rob Bumpstead	UKSA (for item 6)
Joe Cuddeford	UKSA
Steve Ellerd-Elliott	Ministry of Justice
Tim Knight	Work and Pensions
Tom Knight	Ministry of Defence
Charles Loud	ONS (for Martin Ralphs)
Paul Lucas	Education
Rob Reeve (Secretariat)	UKSA
Markus Šova (Secretariat)	ONS
Pete Stokes	ONS
Jennet Woolford	ONS

Apologies

Martin Ralphs	ONS
Roger Halliday	Scottish Government

1. Welcome, minutes and matters arising

1.1 David Fry welcomed the committee and introduced himself as the new Chair of SPSC. Particular welcomes were made to the new members attending their first SPSC meeting:

- i. Tom Knight, Head of Profession, MoD;
- ii. Paul Lucas, Head of the Revenue Funding Analysis Unit, DfE; and
- iii. Martin Ralphs had also joined the committee; however the meeting was attended on his behalf by Charles Lound in his absence.

1.2 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed and the actions were all complete or in hand.

2. Points arising from Summary Reports from Sub-Committees

2.1 Markus Šova provided the Committee with the updates from the SPSC Sub-Committees:

i. Business Register Group

- a) There is a new contractor (Valtech) for the cross-government Business Index who are starting work on the Beta. The Statistical Business Register (SBR) is entering the discovery phase. The delivery manager is Jordan McIver. Anyone interested in the SBR is encouraged to contact him (e-mail: Jordan.mclver@valtech.co.uk , tel. 07964-900759).
- b) The meeting noted a correction to the update report; the co-chairs of the group were Steve Dempsey and Drew Hird from the Department of Business Energy and Industrial Strategy, and Louise Oakley has replaced Virginia Lane.

ii. Methodology Advisory Committee

- a) Pete Brodie has replaced Tricia Dodd as the Chair.
- b) The next MAC meeting will feature papers on anticipating Brexit effects on time series analysis, using administrative VAT data and Quota Sampling guidance.
- c) The Committee was working closely with the recommendations of the Methodology Review which focussed on increasing engagement with the GSS. A response team, led by Gary Brown had been set up to change the structure of methodology within ONS. The meeting noted that David Fry had a meeting with Heather Savory later in the week to discuss this.

iii. National Statistics Harmonisation Steering Group

- a) The Committee discussed the annexes of the proposed changes to age banding and agreed that SPSC should not sign this off without more information. The committee was happy to discuss detailed issues such as this but felt the power to agree the changes should reside with the Harmonisation Steering Group as the group had the relevant expertise. It was suggested that the group should be granted authority to approve these types of changes in the future. Jennet Woolford would feedback the committee's view.

Action: Jen Woolford to feedback SPSC's views to the Harmonisation Steering group.

iv. Presentation and Dissemination Committee

- a) The main priority of PDC was the need for a dissemination platform to meet needs of official statistics producers, where .gov.uk falls short, such as interactive ways of displaying data.

- v. Statistical Services Committee
 - a) SSC had discussed in their last meeting whether it was appropriate to report to SPSC as SSC remits lays within ONS priorities. The committee expressed concern that ONS should be striving to achieve GSS by default but were unsure how SPSC was currently adding value to SSC. It was agreed that the Chair would meet with Glenn Everett to discuss this.

Action: Chair to meet Glenn Everett before the next meeting.

3. Deep Dive – Regional and Geography Committee

- 3.1 Pete Stokes provided a deep dive into the work of the the Regional and Geography Committee (RGC). The committee heard that Pete had chaired RGC for the last eighteen months but would shortly be succeeded by Roma Chappell.
- 3.2 RGC agreed to update their Terms of Reference as result of recent work undertaken which included:
 - i. The recommendations of the 2016 NUTS review, the suggested changes will be coordinated throughout the UK coming into effect in January 2018;
 - ii. The work of DEFRA on taking account of rural areas, looking at rural urban classifications and developing an outline rural evidence hub; and
 - iii. recent discussions around increased demand for better regional and local statistics following the move to devolve powers to city regions and other areas, as well as the findings of the Bean review of UK economic statistics.

Action: Pete Stokes to circulate the Regional and Geography Committee’s updated Terms of Reference with SPSC.

- 3.3 The Devolved Administrators had all been involved in RGC’s work; the challenge was keeping them engaged and providing statistics comparable with the rest of Europe. Another challenge was around lack of harmonisation of outputs for different councils and areas due to the differing powers and capabilities.
- 3.4 More recently there had been a focus on the Geography side of the Committee’s remit, with the ONS Geography Team providing advice across the GSS to Geography Champions. The future focus would be on broadening of the membership of the committee and putting more emphasis on the Regional side where more statistical coherency is needed, additional funding had been provided. SPSC would to provide support for this work through peer reviewing outputs.

4. Safeguarding Update

- 4.1 Jennet Woolford provided the Committee with an update on the ONS Safeguarding Policy. Work on this policy had started about a year ago and has since visited NSDEC and NSEG. Following recommendations provided by these committees, the policy now has a focus on ethical considerations rather than legal constraints, and clarifies safeguarding procedures for different modes of data collection.
- 4.2 The Policy was now ready for pilot stage, due to begin in January 2017. The pilot would consist of approximately 100 interviewers working on the National Study of Health and Wellbeing: Children and Young People and all others surveys they are involved in for around six months or until enough cases are raised to test the policy sufficiently.

- 4.3 The safeguarding task and finish group will compile the feedback to feed into the review of the pilot in mid 2017. The committee provided the following comments:
- i. Members felt that a policy of this nature would be useful in their own departments.
 - ii. The policy's coverage of fraud was discussed, it was noted that interviewers will receive appropriate training, if a concern for welfare is raised then it will be reported but interviewers will not be searching for fraud. Reports of crime would need to be monitored and reviewed.
 - iii. The meeting discussed whether confidentiality pledges will need to be adjusted after implementing the policy.
 - iv. A point was raised around how we will back the decisions made by the National Statistician as the Chief Safeguarding Officer if something goes wrong. Each decision will have to be documented and justified.
 - v. The policy could do with a more informative title such as 'Safeguarding People during Data Collection'

5. Statistical Disclosure Control Guidance for Life Events

- 5.1 Pete Brodie introduced the guidance on protecting confidentiality in tables of birth and death statistics. The work came about as the 2014 version of the guidance required updating. The work had been carried out by the ONS Statistical Policy Group who was in consultation with Public Health England and NHS Digital; the meeting noted the guidance was now at a stage of near completion.
- 5.2 The Committee discussed whether any other bodies should be consulted and how the guidance could move forward from here. It was suggested that the Department for Health and the Census team could also provide input. Life Events statistics was a cross-departmental topic, there were challenges around how decisions are made at the Births and Deaths Registry Office about confidentiality and how to share data when producing statistics to ensure sensitivity. It was queried as to whether disclosure guidance differed between children and adults.

Action: Jen Woolford to look at the disclosure control guidance difference between under 18s and over 18s.

- 5.3 As Life Events was only one area of disclosure, it was discussed that there could be a suite of GSS disclosure guidance for all departments to increase continuity. The meeting also considered how data sharing for statistical purposes could be made more open but would need to establish:
- i. clarity what our authority is;
 - ii. the issue of who owns the data; and
 - iii. the boundaries of public acceptability which could be achieved via consultation.

6. Post Brexit Reflections

- 6.1 Rob Bumpstead updated the Committee on the evolving scene post referendum and the potential effects on the UK statistical system. The National Statistician had put a programme of work in place in response to coordinate on behalf of both ONS and the GSS.
- 6.2 Two particular aspects of the work were discussed:
- i. The Central Policy Secretariat have had a trawl of all EU regulations concerning statistics, preliminary results had identified very few regulations expanded on existing UK domestic powers to produce statistics.
 - ii. Much of the EU regulation stemmed from international regulation set by organisations such as the UN. Engagement with broader those bodies would be

central to a new set of international engagement guiding principles which are being developed by Neil Jackson, chair of the GSS International Committee.

6.3 The committee discussed how the two work streams affected statistical policy and standards:

- i. Statistical outputs may not be required by legislation in the future therefore statistical producers would have the flexibility to create outputs based on meeting used need, adding value to society and allow international comparison.
- ii. The UK will still have international obligations stemming from organisations setting standards at a higher level that will need to be followed.
- iii. There may be renewed standards to the statistics produced in the UK, it will be important to communicate with users to reassure them that quality will not be reduced.
- iv. Through conversations with DExEU, the GSS was encouraged to take lead on this work to broaden international engagement in statistics.

7. Internal Effectiveness Review

7.1 Rob Reeve provided the committee with the results and feedback from the internal SPSC effectiveness review. The review provided the the basis for a discussion around the performance of the last year and reflected on the Committee's objectives.

7.2 The review highlighted some areas of concern for SPSC member and the committee discussed some potential areas of focus over the coming year. The committee discussed how best SPSC could add value to its Sub-Committees, NSEG and the wider GSS. Some of the key issues and potential focuses for the future were highlighted:

- i. Ensuring GSS compliance with polices would be a challenge.
- ii. Increase communication with the Sub-Committees.
- iii. Most work is on an ad hoc basis, more could be done to horizon scan and be proactive and provide strategic leadership.
- iv. A more detailed work plan needs to be constructed incorporating increased cohesion with other groups.
- v. Clarify scope of responsibility.
- vi. Involvement in the Methodology review.
- vii. Scope of creating an integrated risk framework for policies.
- viii. Consider more involvement in the Code of Practice review.
- ix. Devise a cross-departmental process for deciding what should be official Statistics.
- x. Work closely with the Task and Finish Group to create a plan for reviewing the all the GSS Policies, Standards and Guidance.
- xi. Raise profile of Committee – host events and write blogs.

7.3 The chair noted that he would next be visiting NSEG in December to raise committee's concerns and consider work stream priorities. The committee discussed how its strength was the broad view of statistical issues and a wide ranging representation of the GSS but the clear theme for improvement revolved around communication. The chair and secretariat would meet following the meeting to discuss the future work plan.

Action: Chair to take SPSC's ToR to NSEG in December.

Action: Chair to discuss the work plan with the Secretariat and feedback to the Committee in January.

8. Terms of Reference and Forward Agenda

- 8.1 The Chair raised the SPSC Terms of Reference (ToR) for review. The Committee discussed the potential changes to the ToR since the last review in mid 2015.
- i. The objectives in the ToR could be changed to be more proactive to anticipate issues. It was suggested to incorporate horizon scanning in the objectives.
 - ii. Increase the focus on maintaining and facilitating quality.
- 8.2 The meeting discussed the forward agenda which was noted to be a concern in the effectiveness review. The meeting agreed that a forward planner of future item should be decided in advance where possible.
- 8.3 The Committee was advised to get in touch with Rob Reeve for any comments concerning changes to the ToR and forward agenda.

9. AOB

- 9.1 The meeting was provided with a paper on the progress of the Policy Store, an initiative of the SPSC task and finish group. The following comments were made:
- i. The Policy Store would provide a useful single platform for all GSS policies, standards and guidance.
 - ii. Effort should be made to advertise the launch of the Policy Store, which should be achieved through cross-GSS communications.
 - iii. The Committee discussed the scope of creating a policy for deciding how to classify statistics as Official Statistics.
- 9.2 The Committee discussed the work of the Race Disparity Unit's audit project into race outcomes in public services. The next update would be provided to at the next HoPs meeting on 13 December.
- 9.3 It was noted Charlie Wroth Smith was looking for volunteers for the Business Harmonisation Group.

Action: Secretariat to request volunteers for the Business Harmonisation Group through the weekly HoPs email.

Actions table

Actionee	Action	Progress
Jen Woolford	Feedback SPSC's views to the Harmonisation Steering group	
Chair	Chair to meet Glenn Everett before the next meeting	
Pete Stokes	Circulate the Regional and Geography Committee's updated Terms of Reference with SPSC	
Jen Woolford	Look at the disclosure control guidance difference between under 18s and over 18s	
Chair	Take SPSC's ToR to NSEG in December	
Chair	Discuss the work plan with the Secretariat and feedback to the Committee in January	
Secretariat	Request volunteers for the Business Harmonisation Group through the weekly HoPs email	