BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

A breach of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics occurs where one or more provisions of the Code were not followed in situations where an exemption or exception had not been approved by the UK Statistics Authority's Head of Assessment, as required in paragraph (xii) of the Code's preamble. Rules on pre-release access to statistics are covered in the relevant Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Orders; the Code applies as if it includes these orders.

1   Background Information

Name of Statistical Output (including web link)

House Price Index http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/hpi042010

Name of Producer Organisation

Communities and Local Government (CLG)

Name and contact details of person submitting this report, and date of report

On behalf of the Head of Profession for Statistics Communities and Local Government, 5/J5 Eland House Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU 17 June 2010

2   Circumstances of Breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice(s)

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

14 June 2010

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

The House Price Index official statistics release due to be published at 9:30 on 15 June 2010 was inadvertently published on the CLG website 14 June 2010 at 5pm. The release remained accessible for approximately 35 minutes before this inadvertent disclosure was noticed and rectified.

Reasons for breach

The e-Communications team at CLG use a 'times publishing' system allowing their team to prepare material for publishing in advance. The system contains a delay mechanism by which the user enters a date and time for the material to be published. On 14 June 2010 the House Price Index statistical release was being prepared for publication on 15 June 2010 at 9:30am using this times publishing system. When preparing the release a member of the e-Communications team inadvertently put the launch time to be 9:30am on 14 June 2010. As the time input had already passed the material was published in the 'What's New' section of the CLG website just before 5pm on 14 June 2010. The mistake was noticed by a CLG Housing colleague who reported it to the statisticians responsible for the statistical release and e-Communications. Following a request from the statisticians the publication was removed from the site by approximately 5:35pm on 14 June 2010.

3 Reactions and Impact

The error was spotted by a CLG Housing colleague who notified the statisticians responsible for the release and e-Communications. The statisticians requested the removal of the release which was taken down at 5:35pm the same evening. The statistics were therefore in the public domain for approximately 35 minutes. At the time of submitting this report, there is no evidence that the premature release of these statistics had been noticed by, or reported, in the press.

4 Corrective Actions Taken (include short-term actions, and long-term changes made to procedures)

When it became apparent that the statistical release had been published prematurely it was removed from the CLG website and published the next day at the correct time. To stop this occurring in the future it has been proposed that all future releases using the time delay system will be subject to additional checks from an e-Communications colleague before the information is submitted. If, in exceptional circumstances, a colleague is not available to do this then the publication will revert to a manual publication method whereby the e-Communications team will publish the document manually at 9:30am on the day of release.

5 Link to published statements about this breach

None

6 Any other relevant supporting material

None