

# **Title: Minutes of Meeting held on 28 April 2009**

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**Authors:** Science Secretariat

**Background information:** Minutes for ratification

**Action for members:** Discussion

## Summary of Actions

1. **Action from last meeting: David Blunt** to compile a summary of actions taken since the Tackling Knives Action Plan criticism and to provide any new guidance and relevant correspondence to the Committee. **To be complete by 20 July.**
2. **May El Komy** and **Sara Skodbo** to provide clarification regarding whether the proportions derived from the Offender Index and new Adam's Index are static or dynamic and whether the proportion of offences committed by arrestees testing positive for opiates or cocaine refers to the number of all offences committed by the arrestee or the offences for which the arrestee is charged. **To be complete by 1 August 2009.**
3. **Sheila Bird** to contact Mandie Campbell (Director, Drugs and Alcohol Directorate) to raise the SDSSC's concerns regarding the Drug Harms Index. **To be complete by 15 July 2009.**
4. **Sheila Bird** to contact the chairs of Home Office scientific advisory committees to offer them the use of the SDSSC's expertise in any of the statistical issues dealt with by the committees. **To be complete by 30 July 2009.**
5. **Members** to correspond via email to arrange a visit to gather information for the Committee's work on the localisation of crime statistics and crime mapping. **Action Complete.**
6. **Iain Williams** to liaise with the NPIA regarding the SDSSC's work on crime mapping. **To be complete by 20 July.**
7. **Chris Kershaw** to circulate to members links to websites containing progress the Home Office has made to date on meeting the recommendations of the Crime Statistics Review (Nov 2006) and where statistical publications on the Home Office website can be accessed. **Action complete.**
8. **Charles Lound** to select a random sample of a third of the press releases for each of the months under study to verify consistency with members' findings. **To be complete by Nov 2009 with updates at interim SDSSC meetings.**
9. **Members** to continue with the HO Press Release study with **Sheila Bird** and **Mike Hough** looking at press releases in April; **Brian Francis** and **Sue Brooker** to study press releases in May. **To be complete by 5 August 2009.**
10. **Sheila Bird** to contact the Forensic Science Policy Unit to discuss the viability of the committee's proposed work on 'survival time analysis' of samples held on the DNA Database. **To be complete by 20 July 2009.**

## Home Office Surveys, Design and Statistics Sub-Committee

### **Minutes of the seventh meeting of the Home Office Surveys, Design and Statistics Sub-Committee held on 28 April 2009.**

Present - Professor Sheila Bird (*Chair, Medical Research Council Biostatistics Unit*)  
Sue Brooker (*National Centre for Social Research*)  
Professor Brian Francis (*Lancaster University*)  
Professor Mike Hough (*King's College London*)  
Charles Lound (*Office for National Statistics*)

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David Blunt (*Home Office Chief Statistician*)  
Alison Walker (*Home Office Crime Reduction and Community Safety Group*)  
Dr Chris Kershaw (*Home Office Head of Policing Statistics*)

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Dr Iain Williams (*Home Office Science Secretariat*)  
Smita Kaur (*Secretariat*)

#### **Welcome and Introductions**

1. Prof Sheila Bird opened the meeting of the Surveys, Design and Statistics Sub-committee (SDSSC) by welcoming those in attendance including Charles Lound (ONS) who replaces Dave Elliot on the Committee following his retirement from the ONS.
2. Members agreed the following amendment to the minutes of the last meeting:
3. *Page 6, p. 18 to read:* 'Chris Kershaw added that the 'Normington Review' is currently underway looking at the data collection carried out by police. This is likely to reduce the volume of information produced by police forces. The Review is due to report *in February*.
4. Members confirmed the minutes of the last meeting.

#### **Update of Actions**

5. David Blunt advised members that he has compiled a paper regarding the summary of action taken since the Tackling Knives Action Plan criticism and any new guidance and relevant correspondence. He is currently verifying the status of the information before circulating the paper to the Committee.
6. Alison Walker updated members that the Committee's work on the effects of changes in the BCS sample on trend estimates has not yet been commenced. A procurement strategy has been devised and funding for

the work has been identified. Output from this project should be available by the autumn.

7. Alison added that examining the effect of the rolling reference period of when the interviews for the British Crime Survey take place will be added to the Terms of Reference for this project.
8. Sara Skodbo and May El Komy (Home Office Drugs and Alcohol section) provided a report to the SDSSC on some of the concerns members raised at their presentation of the Drug Harm Index at the last meeting (20 January). This was discussed as a separate agenda item.
9. David Blunt provided the chair with a link to Home Office press releases from the Home Office website. The chair had drafted a protocol for the SDSSC's work looking at Home Office statistical press releases and Committee members have commenced their work in this area. This was discussed as a separate agenda item.
10. The chair advised members that she and Iain Williams have liaised with NPIA to discuss the NPIA's network of analysts' input into the SDSSC's work on crime localisation. This was discussed as a separate agenda item.

#### **Chief Statistician's Update:**

11. David Blunt provided an update of key statistical issues since the last meeting. In December 2008, figures showing that the Home Office had met its target regarding the deportation of foreign national prisoners were published. These figures were released with a caveat that this was management information. This release led to an exchange of correspondence between the National Statistician and the chair of the UK Statistics Authority who commented that such high level statistics should be regularised and more context provided.
12. The chief statistician advised members that the UKSA are carrying out a Monitoring Review of "Barriers to trust in crime statistics" which will largely review progress on recommendations of recent reviews of crime. The panel are due to convene in May to discuss its scope and terms of reference. An interim report is expected in mid-July with a final report in September.
13. The chair, the chief statistician and Mike Hough informed members that they had been invited to join the panel.
14. The Home Office Chief Scientific Advisor and colleagues from the Home Office Statistics team conducted work on measuring police confidence levels starting with a baseline of 45%, with a target aim of 60%. Members expressed surprise that the PSA does not take into account co-variance, preferring to apply a blanket 60% target. The Chief Statistician added that to assist the police the Home Office provided some guidance on

understanding demographics and that even though this is a very complex issue, the confidence factor is identifiable.

15. The chief statistician added that in April 2009, the Home Office published their latest quarterly crime statistics. These figures showed no significant change in crime trends.

#### **Drug Harm Index (DHI):**

16. The chair invited members to comment on paper 01-07 '*Additional note on the DHI*', circulated to members ahead of the meeting in response to concerns raised by the Committee at the last meeting.
17. Members commented that confusion remained over whether the proportions derived from the Offender Index and new Adam's Index are static or dynamic. Clarification is also required on whether the proportion of '*offences committed by arrestees testing positive for opiates or cocaine*' refers to the number of all offences committed by the arrestee or the offences for which the arrestee is charged.
18. **[Action: *May El Komy* and *Sara Skodbo* to provide clarification regarding whether the proportions derived from the Offender Index and new Adam's Index are static or dynamic and whether the proportion of offences committed by arrestees testing positive for opiates or cocaine refers to the number of all offences committed by the arrestee or the offences for which the arrestee is charged. *To be complete by 1 August 2009*].**
19. Members expressed concerns that any press release which reported that drug use was declining based on this methodology would be anomalous. The chair agreed to contact the Director of the Home Office Drugs and Alcohol Research Directorate to raise the Committee's concerns.

**[Action: *Sheila Bird* to contact Mandie Campbell (Director, Drugs and Alcohol Directorate) to raise the SDSSC's concerns regarding the Drug Harms Index. *To be complete by 15 July 2009*].**

#### **Home Office Science Advisory Committees:**

20. Iain Williams gave a summary of scientific advisory committees run by the Home Office (See Annex A). Within their remit, it is possible that these committees may be required to deal with complex statistical issues. Members agreed that they would be happy to offer their advice on any statistical issues referred to them by Home Office advisory committees.

**[Action: *Sheila Bird* to contact the chairs of the Home Office scientific advisory committees to offer them the use of the SDSSC's expertise in any of the statistical issues dealt with by the committees. *To be complete by 30 July 2009*].**

### Local crime statistics:

21. The chair referred members to Paper 04-07 '*Outline for the SDSSC report on localisation of crime statistics*', outlining topics that the Committee may wish to focus on in their work in the area of localisation of crime statistics.
22. Chris Kershaw commented that police forces are responsible for the publication of their own data, but that it has been suggested that the NPIA could develop a database that publishes data from all police forces but this would not be quality assured.
23. Members commented that a key consideration of the Committee's work in this area will be to agree how to standardise by population. Members agreed that this could be achieved by analysing the location of the crime and the location of the victims' residences.
24. The chair added that initial correspondence with policing contacts had indicated that they would welcome the Committee's thoughts on the area of crime mapping and may welcome a visit by the SDSSC to view latest progress in this area. Members agreed that any visit would be an information-gathering exercise to inform their advice. It would also be imperative to keep policing colleagues aware of any work done.

**[Action:** Members to correspond via email to arrange a visit to gather information for the Committee's work on the localisation of crime statistics and crime mapping. **Action complete].**

25. Members agreed that the output of this work would compile a report comprising a small number of key points from the information gathered to assist in crime mapping and analysis of the data gathered.
26. The chair has also liaised with the NPIA regarding crime mapping. Iain Williams advised members that as the SDSSC's remit does not cover the NPIA, any advice the SDSSC provided would have to be at the request of the NPIA. It was recognised that many issues may be relevant to both the HO and the NPIA.

**[Action: Iain Williams** to liaise with the NPIA regarding the SDSSC's work on crime mapping. **To be complete by 20 July]** .

27. The chair added that another area of work that may interest the group would be to ascertain what progress has been made to meet the recommendations of the Crime Statistics Review (CSR)<sup>1</sup> and whether the SDSSC can assist in driving these forward. Chris Kershaw commented that the Home Office's progress to date on the CSR's recommendations is available on the Home Office website.

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<sup>1</sup> Crime Statistics: An Independent Review (Prof Adrian Smith, November 2006)

**[Action: Chris Kershaw** to circulate to members links to websites containing progress the Home Office has made to date on meeting the recommendations of the Crime Statistics Review (Nov 2006) and where statistical publications on the Home Office website can be accessed. **Action complete].**

#### **HO Press Release Study:**

28. The chair updated members of progress to date regarding the Committee's work on Home Office press releases with some aspect of statistical content to look for any gaps or anomalies. The work had been randomly allocated prior to the meeting. The chair and Mike Hough had looked at press releases from Feb 2008 and 2009. Initial findings suggested that members generally identified the same issues but that there was some disagreement on the most appropriate way to codify these findings. Members proposed that points of agreement would form the focus of the report.
29. Members commented that it is necessary to be proportionate in the judgements made on statistics contained in press releases and that the focus should centre on broad issues rather than focussing on minutiae.
30. Charles Lound agreed to undertake a study of a random sample of one third of the press releases per month to verify consistency with members' findings.

**[Action: Charles Lound** to select a random sample of a third of the press releases for each of the months under study to verify consistency with members' findings. **To be complete by Nov 2009 with updates at interim SDSSC meetings].**

31. David Blunt agreed, adding that it will be efficient to highlight anomalies that can be rectified using an incremental approach. He also stated that statisticians are increasingly being consulted when press releases are being prepared.
32. Members agreed that their individual records would be collated to compile a consensus report which will then be submitted to the Home Office. (Please see appendix B for the time frame for this work).

**[Action: Sheila Bird and Mike Hough** to continue with the HO Press Release studying looking at press releases in April; **Brian Francis** and **Sue Brooker** to study press releases in May. **To be complete by 5 August 2009.]**

#### **AOB:**

33. The chair commented that some statistical analysis into the samples held on the National DNA Database (NDNAD) may be of interest to the Committee, in particular whether samples are held in such a manner that alongside the sample, information is held on the date of the recording of

the sample, whether the donor of the sample was charged or convicted and what proportion of innocent donors were subsequently charged with a crime. The chair agreed to contact the Forensic Science Policy Unit to raise these points.

**[Action: Sheila Bird** to contact the Forensic Science Policy Unit to discuss the viability of the committee's proposed work on 'survival time analysis' of samples held on the DNA Database. **To be complete by 20 July 2009].**

34. Iain Williams advised members that the NDNAD is managed by the NPIA which, as a Home Office non-departmental body, is not within the SDSSC's jurisdiction. If the NPIA wants advice from the SDSSC, it would need to be requested. Where there are issues that are relevant to both the Home Office and the NPIA, there may be a mechanism for the SDSSC to advise the NPIA. The chair and Iain Williams have begun discussions with the NPIA to take this work forward.
35. Iain Williams advised members that in February 2009, the Home Office launched their second Science and Innovation Strategy 2009-2012. The Strategy includes references to the Department's use and collation of statistics, most notably in the areas of crime and policing.
36. Alison Walker updated members that the Crime Surveys Team have commenced a survey on commercial and industrial victimisation as recommended by the Crime Statistics Review (Prof Adrian Smith, November 2006).<sup>2</sup>
37. The chair thanked members for their contributions and closed the meeting.

**Date of next meeting:**

Tbc.

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<sup>2</sup> Recommendation 2.2: We recommend that the Home Office should carry out a survey of commercial and industrial victimisation every two years' pg 10, Crime Statistics: An Independent Review (Prof Adrian Smith, November 2006)

## **Home Office Science Advisory Committees**

### **Home Office Science Advisory Committee (HOSAC)**

The HOSAC is the overarching scientific advisory group in the Home Office. Chaired jointly by the Permanent Secretary and an independent member of the Committee, the HOSAC was established in 2003 and comprises six independent members (nominated by learned societies relevant to the department), the chairs of the Animal Procedures Committee and the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs. The Surveys, Design and Statistics sub-committee is a HOSAC sub-committee.

### **Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD)**

The ACMD is an advisory NDPB that has a statutory duty to consider any matter referred to them by Ministers on drug related issues including their control, classification and scheduling under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and its Regulations. The Home Secretary is obliged by law to consult the ACMD before laying orders or making regulations.

### **Animal Procedures Committee (APC)**

The APC is established under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. The Committee advises Ministers, in relation to experimental or other scientific procedures applied to a protected animal which may cause the animal pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm.

### **The National DNA Database Ethics committee**

The National DNA Database Ethics committee is a new advisory NDPB. Initially it is set up to advise on the ethics relating to the management and use of the DNA Database, which has very high media profile. In the future, its role could be extended to cover ethics issues in forensic science wider than DNA.

### **Forensic Science Quality Regulator and the Forensic Science Advisory Committee (FSAC)**

The Forensic Science Quality Regulator has been created to set and monitor minimum quality standards for the provision of forensic science services. To support the Regulator the Forensic Science Advisory Committee (FSAC) was established. Chaired by the Regulator, the FSAC comprises key stakeholders in forensic science who will provide expert advice to the Regulator.

**Study of Home Office Press Releases – timeline**

**February-September '09** – In randomly allocated pairs, committee members undertake study of Home Office press releases with statistical content to identify gaps/lacunae.

**October '09** – Study complete; members collate consensus findings.

November '09 – Submission of report to the Home Office.