

MEETING OF THE STATISTICS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
21st February 2017
Conference Room A, Netherleigh, Massey Avenue, Belfast, BT4 2JP

In attendance

Mr Philip McDonagh (Chair)	
Mrs Sharon McNicholl	
Dr Chris Morris	
Dr Kieran Payne	
Dr Bernie Stuart	
Dr David Marshall	NISRA
Dr Tracy Power	NISRA
Ms Linda Keys	NISRA
Mr Chris Ganley	NISRA
Mr Damian Buchanan	NISRA
Mr Robin Griffith	NISRA, Secretary

Item No.	Subject	Action
1.	<p>Welcome and apologies.</p> <p>Mr McDonagh welcomed everyone to the meeting, noting that Linda Keys had replaced Deborah Lyness as the ELMS representative to the meeting.</p> <p>Apologies were received from Mr Richard Ramsey, Mr John Compton, Mrs Esther Ervin, Mr David Jones, Mr Derek Bond, Mrs Siobhan Carey and Dr James Gillan.</p>	
2.	<p>Minutes and Matters Arising</p> <p>The draft minutes of the Committee meeting on 6 October were approved.</p> <p>Mr McDonagh summarised the actions from the October meeting and updated the Committee on progress to date. One action is to be taken forward:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter to be issued to the ONS reminded them to consult with the Committee prior to releasing any new surveys under the Order 	
3.	<p>Chair's Business</p> <p>Mr McDonagh briefed the Committee on a number of matters:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. As discussed in the October meeting a letter was issued from the Committee to the Minister of the Department of Finance highlighting increasing statistical workloads associated with the Programme for Government and other work requirements. The Minister has responded to this letter and it is understood 	

	<p>that this has been helpful.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. A letter has been drafted to the ONS to remind them of their responsibility to consult with the Committee prior to releasing any new surveys under the 1988 Order and encouraging them to build this into their processes. Dr Marshall noted the ONS may need to be able to consult the Committee at short notice. 3. The Committee is using a bilingual logo from January 2017 and this has been used on the letter to ONS. 4. Dr Stuart and Dr Payne have volunteered to participate in the Queens and UU boardroom mentoring schemes circulated in January. The schemes will not be using Committee members in this tranche. 5. Mr McDonagh highlighted the meetings on the ONS Stocktake of the Code of Practice taking place today and tomorrow. Dr Power provided a summary of the current position of the Stocktake. 	Secretary to issue letter to ONS
4.	<p>Consultations</p> <p>Ms Keys updated the committee on ONS consultations. Currently the ONS is not consulting on any business surveys.</p>	
5.	<p>Update on Economic and Labour Market Statistics Statutory matters</p> <p>Ms Keys provided an update on ELMS statutory surveys. There are currently no new statutory surveys requiring advice from the Committee in this meeting.</p> <p>The SERVCOM survey remains in development; this will be a statutory monthly survey with a sample of approximately 40,000 UK businesses, of which approximately 2,000 will be Northern Ireland businesses. SERVCOM is designed to address issues highlighted in the Bean Review of Economic Statistics that coverage of the UK services sector is felt to be inadequate for user needs. Pilots of the survey have not yet begun and further details will be presented to the Committee in June.</p> <p>ELMS are also giving consideration to the collection of job vacancy information from employers. It is anticipated this will require either a new survey or an extension to an existing statutory survey. The format this research will take has yet to be confirmed. More detail will be provided to the Committee in June.</p>	Updates on SERVCOM and job vacancy survey to be provided to June meeting
6.	<p>Update on Economic and Labour Market Statistics Non-Statutory matters</p> <p>Ms Keys updated the Committee on ELMS non-statutory issues, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department for the Economy published a paper on the potential impact of the 	

	<p>National Living Wage in Northern Ireland. It was noted this may be something the Committee would like to be briefed on during the June meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The collection of Local Unit data on the Annual Business Inquiry has been discontinued. This information will instead be sourced from returns to the Business Register and Employment Survey. This decision was taken to reduce business burden and data duplication. • NISRA presented to Business & Assembly Trust members. This presentation was similar to that delivered to the Committee by James Gillan in October. The discussion was led by Stephen Kelly from Manufacturing NI. • ELMS are continuing to roll out Electronic Data Collection. All surveys will be eligible to complete their returns electronically from March 2017. Mr Ganley noted that efforts are ongoing to increase respondent uptake of the new format. It is anticipated that EDC should further reduce business burden. 	<p>ELMS to demonstrate the Integrated Business Survey System and EDC at the June meeting</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p>Official Statistics Update</p> <p>Dr Power updated the Committee on Official Statistics issues.</p> <p>There are currently a number of ongoing assessments of Official Statistics. Further work is required to address issues highlighted during the review of the House Conditions Survey and Tourism Statistics. It was noted that while Tourism Statistics have developed well since initial assessments they will not be taken forward for National Statistics status at this time. The House Conditions Survey is the first to be reviewed under the new assessment method.</p> <p>Dr Power noted the number of reported breaches had increased in 2016. In each instance the senior statistician in charge of the data has taken prompt action. Many of these breaches occurred when pre-release documents were forwarded to someone not on the access list. NISRA is working to ensure those on pre-release lists are aware of their responsibilities. Technical issues have also caused some breaches. ONS have reduced pre-release access from 24 to 21 hours.</p> <p>The new Official Statistics Order; which was to name Translink, the Education Authority and Invest NI as producers of official statistics, was due to come into operation on 1 April 2017. However, this must be approved by the NI Assembly. Therefore NISRA is unable to provide a confirmed date until the Assembly is up and running again. It was highlighted that the Department for Infrastructure are keen to access statistics covering private sector transport companies. It was agreed that NISRA should follow up with DfI and provide the committee with further details on the coverage of NI transport statistics</p>	<p>NISRA to provide the committee with details on DfI's coverage of NI transport statistics</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p>Programme for Government Update</p> <p>Dr Power provided an update on the current status of the Programme for Government. The work is close to completion and the consultation has been finalised.</p> <p>NISRA statisticians participated in technical assessment panels in which statisticians responsible for the data were asked to rigorously explain and justify their data.</p> <p>The PfG is currently on hold until after the election and return of the Executive; this has created some uncertainty around the future of the PfG. However, given the work already completed by NISRA it is anticipated they will be able to meet future requirements. The need to inform new Ministers and special advisers of the detail of</p>	

	<p>the statistics involved was noted.</p> <p>There is also some uncertainty around the budget for the 2021 census which cannot be approved without the Executive in place.</p> <p>Dr Payne inquired if NISRA had a method in place for highlighting any areas of concern with the PfG data. Dr Power explained that accompanying quality information will be published and where the data is not to the official statistics standard this will be highlighted.</p>	
9.	<p>Update on Broad Economy Sales and Export Statistics</p> <p>Mr Buchanan provided an overview of the Broad Economy Sales and Exports Survey results, explaining that differences exist between the survey's results and the results produced by HMRC using their administrative data. The HMRC results indicate NI exports are growing while ELMS results show decline. Reasons for these differences include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differences in the regional allocation of exports • The head office effect which disproportionately allocates exports to London • The "unknown" element of HMRC exports where sales cannot be attributed to any particular region <p>Research carried out by HMRC indicated that the increase in NI exports reported by HMRC was being driven by exports of medicinal and pharmaceutical products. Results from BESES do not support this growth.</p> <p>Dr Marshall noted that following this work NISRA has written to the Chief Statistician in HMRC and that the next step should be a conversation with the HMRC at a senior level.</p> <p>It was noted that NI exports data are crucial to any discussion of Brexit and it is recommended that BESES data are used as the basis of any regional analysis of Brexit.</p>	Secretary to distribute Exports publication to Committee
10.	<p>Overview of the role of SAC</p> <p>Mr McDonagh summarised the future work programme for the Committee, noting that the intention is to invite the lead analyst in each government department to present to the Committee.</p> <p>Dr Stuart commented that in light of Dr Power's comments on the PfG it would be valuable to meet with the Executive Office statisticians earlier. It was agreed that statisticians from the Executive Office would be invited to attend the October SAC meeting.</p>	Secretary to invite statisticians from the Executive Office to the October Committee meeting
11.	<p>Implications of Brexit for Statistics in Northern Ireland</p> <p>Mr McDonagh introduced the subject, explaining that a brief discussion on this matter had taken place during the October meeting, and asked Dr Marshall to update the committee on NISRA's work on Brexit.</p> <p>Dr Marshall explained that NISRA has been supplying data to policy colleagues with the NICS regarding NI's relationship with the Republic of Ireland and the wider EU. Nothing has been published by NISRA on this matter. The Republic of Ireland's Central Statistics</p>	

	<p>Office has published a paper summarising all statistics they hold on the relationship between Ireland and the UK. Members asked that the availability of statistics on Brexit-related issues including trade and migration should be kept under review.</p> <p>Dr Marshall also explained that the UK statistical system is set up according to EU regulations. This currently remains unchanged and this includes the UK's approach to collecting the 2021 census. By removing the requirement to follow EU regulations the statistical infrastructure could be changed in the future, this includes business surveys.</p> <p>It was agreed that the sub-group appointed at the last meeting to look at this area of statistics could be stood down as matters had progressed</p>	
12	<p>Next Meeting</p> <p>The next meeting of the Committee was agreed for 10 am on 14 June 2017. It was impossible to find one date that suited all Members so this was the most suitable for the majority. This meeting will be held in NISRA's new headquarters at Colby House, Stranmillis.</p> <p>Following discussion it was determined that statisticians from the Department for the Economy should be invited to present at the June meeting.</p> <p>The following meeting of the Committee will take place in October 2017. The Secretary will consult on dates.</p>	<p>Secretary to issue note confirming the time and location of the June meeting.</p> <p>Secretary to invite statisticians from DfE to the June Committee meeting.</p> <p>Secretary to issue doodle poll for October meeting</p>

Robin Griffith Secretary February 2017