

Statistics Commission

MINUTES OF FORTY FIFTH COMMISSION MEETING

17 JANUARY 2008

Present: **Commission**
David Rhind (chairman)
Sir Derek Wanless (vice chairman)
Colette Bowe
Ian Beesley
Joly Dixon
Isabelle Low
Janet Trewsdale
Martin Weale

Secretariat
Richard Alldritt
Alison Eve
Britta Moeller

1. Minutes of meeting 22 November 2007

The minutes were agreed.

2. Chairman's report

- (i) *Last Commission meeting* – The chairman thanked Commission members and secretariat staff for their work and support over the past eight years.
- (ii) *Statistics Board developments* – Commission members noted that the membership of the new Statistics Board had been announced and welcomed the wide range of interests and expertise represented by the new members. Members congratulated the chairman on his appointment to the Board. He reported that Professor Adrian Smith and Lord Rowe-Beddoe had been appointed as vice chairs. The Statistics Board is expected to meet once a month until its official take-over on 1 April 2008. Commission members also discussed the working structure of the Board; in particular the varying time commitments required from the Board's chair and the other members. It was also noted that some of the posts in support of the Statistics Board's secretariat had now been advertised.

(iii) *Meeting with chairman of Migrationwatch* – The chairman reported the Commission had been approached by Migrationwatch to investigate statistics on the proportion of immigrants from EU member countries to the UK following a ministerial statement on the issue. He had met with the chairman of Migrationwatch to discuss details and the secretariat would prepare a note on the issue in due course.

Action: secretariat

(iv) *Outstanding Commission work* – The chairman confirmed that the draft report on the history of the Commission would be circulated shortly. The practicalities of publishing outstanding reports (the statistical first releases project, the history and the Commission's last annual report) – after the remaining staff of the secretariat had moved into the HM Treasury building – were also discussed.

Action: secretariat

(v) *Treasury Select Committee inquiry into 'Counting the Population'* – The chairman reported on his evidence session at the Treasury Select Committee on 16 January 2008 as part of the committee's inquiry into 'Counting the Population'. Questions focused in particular on the benefits of a National Address Register, the use of registers in combination with linked surveys, uses of registers in other European countries as well as credible alternatives to the Census. The chairman gave evidence with Keith Dugmore of *Demographic Decisions* and Professor David Martin on behalf of the Royal Statistical Society.

(vi) *Public controversy regarding claims by former IC chief executive* – Commission members noted the recent news coverage of legal action taken by the former chief executive of the Information Centre for health and social care in relation to the Department of Health's joint-venture with *Dr Foster Holdings LLP*.

3. **Chief executive's report – SC/2008/01**

(i) *Select Committee arrangements for scrutiny of Statistics Board* – The chief executive drew attention to a recent report by the House of Lords Liaison Committee. The committee expressed support for Lord Jenkin's

proposals for a joint parliamentary body responsible for oversight and scrutiny of the work of the new Statistics Board.

- (ii) *Reactions to Commission's briefing note on foreign workers* – The chief executive reported that the Commission's briefing note in response to public confusion over the number of foreign (or migrant workers) in employment had been well received and was quoted in various newspaper articles.
- (iii) *UN Statistical Commission annual meeting* – the chief executive might be attending the annual meeting of the United Nations Statistical Commission to be held at the Commission's headquarters in New York from 26-29 February 2008.
- (iv) *Public trust in statistics* – the chief executive reported that ONS's field work on public confidence in official statistics as part of the Omnibus survey had been completed and that a report on the results would be published in a few weeks. The Statistics Commission had agreed to contribute towards the cost of the project.

4. Draft response to Cabinet Office/Treasury consultation on 'Limiting pre-release access to statistics' – SC/2008/02

Commission members considered the draft response to the recently published Cabinet Office/Treasury consultation on pre-release access to official statistics and made some editorial comments. It was suggested to argue for a maximum of 3 (rather than 24) hours pre-release access and to tighten the Commission's position on the definition of 'exceptional circumstance' that allow for the granting of pre-release access. It was also agreed to stress the Commission's view that the procedure for granting pre-release access needed to be closely and regularly monitored and to highlight that the draft Order only applied pre-release access to statistics 'in their final form' – leaving room for exploitation to circulate draft statistical releases. The secretariat will amend the Commission's response to the consultation accordingly.

Action: secretariat

5. Review of statistical first releases (draft conclusions and progress update) – SC/2008/03

Commission members noted good progress had been made on the first releases project and agreed that the draft conclusions showed some interesting results. It was suggested that it would be helpful to clarify the explanations of the 'good practice criteria' and provide more information on how they were used to carry out the assessments.

Action: secretariat

6. *Official Statistics: Value and Trust*

Commission Report No. 38 was published on the same morning as the Commission meeting and will be widely circulated. Commission members noted the general covering letter and discussed the possibilities of preparing a presentation of the report's main messages as well as an editorial newspaper piece.

Action: secretariat

7. Wind up of Statistics Commission – oral update

The remaining secretariat staff will leave the Artillery Row offices on 31 January 2008. Temporary accommodation for staff will be provided in HM Treasury for the remaining two months, including provision of HMT email accounts. The chief executive noted that by mid-February the secretariat was likely to have only three full-time staff members. The Commission's website will be live until 2010 and maintained by ONS staff. After two years ONS will organise the transfer of all online content and documents to the National Archives. Hard copies of Commission reports will be stored in the ONS Newport Library.

8. Final observation

The chairman noted that it had been a great pleasure to chair such an able and good humoured Commission and thanked all the members and staff for their contribution over the years.

Secretariat
Statistics Commission
January 2008