

Independence for Statistics: A consultation on the independence of Statistics

Response by Local Government Analysis and Research to HM Treasury Consultation

1. Introduction

1. This paper is the response from Local Government Analysis and Research (LGAR) to the HM Treasury 'Independence for Statistics' document. LGAR has recently been established as a corporate service to national bodies representing local government and to local government more widely. We welcome the opportunity to be involved in the consultation process and are pleased that HM Government is to legislate for independence in statistics, following from a review of the existing Framework for National Statistics.

2. This response brings together the perceptions of key stakeholders and agencies within local government, and supports the position outlined by the Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA) in their response to this consultation.

2. Context

3. The use of national statistics are of paramount importance to local government as they provide a key mechanism by which funding is allocated and decisions made. We support the independence for statistics and believe in the importance of ensuring that these statistics are robust and impartial and that all users can have confidence in them.

3. Key issues

4. For local government, we have identified the following key issues:
- **Fitness for purpose:** We would like to stress that central government is not the only user of this data and that any development should also serve the important role that data plays within the local government context;
 - **Reduction of burden:** We support the need to reduce burden and strongly support the principle that customer data needs are carefully identified at the outset and that therefore data is collected once and applied in various contexts on the grounds of efficiency in the use of public resources;

- **Equality of access:** Local government should be provided with the same access to data as central government;
- **Independence:** We support the principle of independence referred to in the consultation and feel that this should apply to the totality of the decentralised structure proposed, (including governance), as well as to the ONS;
- **Governance and accountability:** We support the principle that new systems and structures for collection, analysis and output of data are transparent and are as robust as is possible, within realistic constraints;
- **Representation:** We recommend that local government has representation on the new independent Governing Board, as a key user of data output;
- **Legislation:** There is a need to review and, where necessary, update current legislation to support the new systems and structures and to clarify data access issues. For example, to remove unnecessary barriers to effective delivery of local government functions which arise through prohibitions on local government access to data.

5. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues further.

Tim Allen

Director, Local Government Analysis and Research

13 June, 2006