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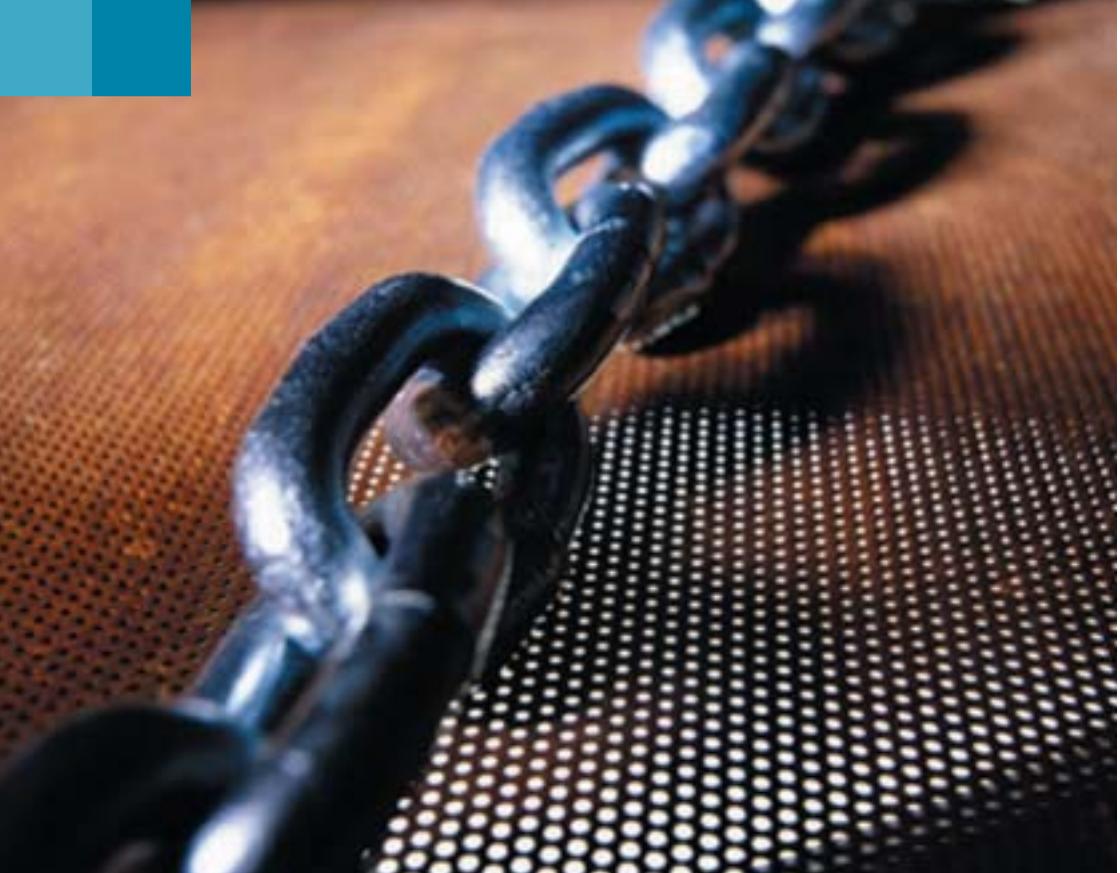


*Local Government Association*



# Concordat on Statistics

between Central and Local Government



# CLIP

*Central & Local Government Information Partnership*



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# Concordat on Statistics between Central and Local Government

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# Foreword

**By: John Prescott MP, Deputy Prime Minister**  
**Sir Jeremy Beecham, Chairman of the Local Government Association**  
**Len Cook, the National Statistician**

One of the cornerstones of Government is the relationship between Central and Local Government. The high volume of information which is exchanged between these tiers of government is vital in understanding new policy requirements and monitoring existing initiatives. The Central and Local Government Information Partnership (CLIP) performs a key role in ensuring that the relationship works effectively for statistics.

As you will read, in recent years it has become clear that there is a need for a document which formally sets out the principles underlying the interaction between Central and Local Government on statistics. CLIP has invested a significant amount of resource in what we believe will be a very helpful document for the many public servants that are involved in the information exchange process. We endorse the principles within the document and ask that you abide by them.

The Concordat fits in with other Central and Local Government policy initiatives, in the push towards the improvement in the delivery of public services, and to make services more citizen-focused, and improve the quality of life for local communities. The Local Government Modernisation Agenda requires high quality information to inform good policy-making and for providing better services to the citizen. The Concordat also supports the Shared Priorities between Central and Local Government which was launched in July 2002.

We are very pleased that our organisations have worked so closely together in the production of the Concordat. In particular, we would

like to thank the members of the CLIP Steering Group, chaired by Mike Hughes from Department for Transport (ex DTLR), for their hard work and commitment.

Signed by



John Prescott  
Deputy Prime Minister



Sir Jeremy Beecham  
Chairman of the Local  
Government Association



Len Cook  
the National  
Statistician



# Introduction

1. This Concordat sets out an agreed framework for co-operation between Central and Local Government in England in relation to statistics. It does not constitute a legally enforceable contract or create any rights or obligations that are legally enforceable - it is intended to be binding in honour only.

## Purpose of Concordat

2. Central and Local Government are mutually dependent and it is recognised that the objectives of both can best be delivered by a partnership in which central and local government support and respect each other's roles and work together in the implementation of policy.
3. Co-operation with respect to statistics is necessary to meet their respective policy and business objectives. The purpose of this Concordat is to specify the basis on which central and local government in England will consult with each other, exchange information, and work together in relation to statistics.

## Background

4. A Sub-committee of the Treasury Select Committee conducted an inquiry on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) during 1998/99. In its report, it recommended that ONS be proactive in seeking to negotiate service level agreements with partner bodies – in particular, it said an agreement with local government should be pursued. This recommendation fitted in well with the shared vision between central and local government of a need for increased co-operation and

partnership with respect to statistics, based on greater openness and trust, and for a framework to underpin this.

5. Following this report, there have been a number of developments regarding the governance of official statistics, particularly the publication of a White Paper on statistics in October 1999 and the publication of the *'Framework for National Statistics'* in June 2000. Ministers have agreed that there should be a range of statistical outputs, designated National Statistics, which can be assured to be produced to professional standards of quality and free from political interference. The standards under which National Statistics will be produced are set out in a Code of Practice, which has been developed and will be maintained by the National Statistician, the UK Government's chief professional advisor on statistical matters (and a co-signatory of this concordat).
6. The Concordat has been put together by a task force of the Central and Local Government Information Partnership (CLIP), which includes the Office for National Statistics, and endorsed by that forum. CLIP oversees the exchange of non-financial information and statistics between central and local government and comprises civil servants, representatives from the Local Government Association and practitioners from all types of authorities from across England. Its purpose, aims and structure are described in Annex A.
7. The Concordat also covers financial statistics. For this reason, it has been agreed with the equivalent group to CLIP with responsibility for financial statistics, the Working Group on Local Government Financial Statistics (WGLGFS). Its purpose, aims and structure are described in Annex B.

## Parties to the Concordat and arrangements for review

8. This Concordat is made between the Deputy Prime Minister, the Chairman of the Local Government Association and the National Statistician.
9. It will be formally reviewed after two years, and thereafter every five years - although a formal review can be held at any time at the request of any party. A review of the operation of the Concordat will be conducted each year. The views of all parties must be sought on any proposed changes to the Concordat.

## Scope of the Concordat

10. The Concordat is overarching and general in nature. It covers central and local government activity involving the compilation, provision and use of information for statistical purposes, including information obtained on a regular basis from administrative, statistical or other sources, where they have a direct interest as information providers or users. It does not cover information collected on an ad-hoc basis. The Concordat will be reviewed in light of any changes in regional structures currently under discussion by the Government.

## Openness and trust

11. Co-operation between central and local government staff with respect to statistics will be based on openness and trust. In particular, staff will:

- Be accessible and responsive to requests from each other;
- Be open about all aspects of the statistical processes in their area of work;
- Explain the context of and basis for statistical advice they may provide;
- Invite and respond promptly to comments on their statistics and processes.

## Consultation

12. Central and Local Government will consult each other in areas of mutual interest - in particular, when preparing specifications for the collection of data and in planning for the dissemination of results. It is the responsibility of each party to inform, and seek comment from, the other about any proposed significant changes to existing activity, or proposed release of statistical information, which might be considered relevant to the other, and to allow sufficient time in order to do so.
13. As future new policy initiatives are introduced by Government, the Concordat will form the basis for discussion on the information needs of the new policy. Where new or revised data collections are proposed, local authorities should be involved at the earliest practicable stage to ensure that central requirements dovetail with information needed by local authorities as managers of the services. Wherever possible, joint consultative/working groups with joint CG/LA membership should provide a steer for the work in hand.
14. The National Statistician will also seek the views of the Local Government Association on (i) major national statistical policy

issues and (ii) priorities for National Statistics (as part of its planning processes), while the LGA will seek the views of Central Government on major local government statistics developments.

## Access to data

15. Both Central and Local Government collect and process statistical information that may be required by the other to meet their business needs. National Statistics is based on the concept of trust: in particular, public trust in the National Statistician (and through him to all producers of National Statistics) for ensuring that individual information supplied by the public is protected. As such, the general principle for National Statistics in respect of access to individually identifiable statistical records is that unless the data collection is a joint or shared activity (with local government), the National Statistician will not allow access to those records. However, at higher levels of aggregation, or where individual information given in confidence cannot be identified, the presumption underpinning the partnership on statistics between Central and Local Government is that statistical data of mutual interest should be made available to each other unless there are specific reasons for not doing so (and in these cases, those reasons should be explained).
16. To maximise the use of statistical data, key considerations are:
  - Information should be provided to each other about what data are available and the controls and restrictions applying to it;
  - Data should be made available as quickly as possible;

- There should be clear statements on the costs incurred in providing and making data available;
  - Information should be available to enable the user to understand the data; and
  - Details of the quality of the data (for example, confidence intervals) should be provided.
17. Central and Local Government will strive to make as much statistical data available as possible by electronic means, including via the Internet.

## Charging for data

18. It is recognised that there are significant costs to local government of collecting and returning data to Central Government, and that there may be significant costs to Central Government in processing and disseminating that data. In cases where the data providers are local authorities, and in the spirit of shared ownership, Central Government Departments will make available free to any responding local authority, as well as the LGA, the full national database for separate analysis in a recognised format, subject to confidentiality and legal restrictions. Even where the latter do apply, an aggregated database at the appropriate area level should be provided where at all possible.
19. Other data that may be of mutual interest, but that are collected or compiled from alternative sources, will be charged for within existing central and local government charging policies. But in no cases will such policies seek to make a profit from central or local government. In this respect, the maximum that will be charged is for the recovery of costs.

Where charging policies do not exist, data will be supplied free of charge.

## Confidentiality issues

20. Of paramount importance in the production of National Statistics is the need to safeguard and assure confidentiality of data which has been supplied on a confidential basis. As stated previously, the general principle for National Statistics in respect of access to individually identifiable statistical records is that unless the data collection is a joint or shared activity (with local government), the National Statistician will not allow access to those records. Thus in the context of this concordat, there are two main forms of joint or shared activity for which rules and agreements are required to protect information which has been supplied in confidence and which are required for statistical purposes:
  - information on individual persons or businesses collected by local government which are required by central government or vice versa;
  - information on local authorities themselves which are required by central government. It should be noted that most data sets for local authorities are not confidential, though there are exceptions to this rule.
21. For these two cases, central and local government will ensure that their arrangements for collecting, holding and using any individually identifiable data comply with the relevant data protection legislation (where there is no overriding legal basis for handling differently) and with other statutory provisions. They will make clear to what extent the data they provide each other will be treated as confidential, will respect the

confidentiality of all information supplied in confidence, and ensure that it is used for statistical purposes only unless specified by statute or agreed by respondents.

22. Beyond that, producers of National Statistics will abide by the principles and standards on the protection of confidential data set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice and in any underlying protocols which contain further detail on the application of these standards. Annex C sets out the relevant principles and standards of the Code of Practice.

## Data collection

23. Central Government will seek to place the minimum load necessary on local authority data suppliers and keep their compliance costs to a minimum, consistent with the need to produce statistics that are fit for purpose and value for money. Local authorities will be informed of the requirement for their data, whether the inquiry is voluntary or statutory, and whether the data they provide will be treated in confidence.
24. Central and local government will both make use of existing data sources, wherever cost-effective and practicable, in order to ensure consistency between local and national data and to help avoid placing additional loads on data suppliers. Central requirements for data should be dovetailed so far as practicable with collection of data locally, in terms of harmonised definitions and concepts. Where local requirements for data are more detailed than is justifiable at the national level, a framework should be agreed to enable aggregation of detailed data to higher levels. In particular, central government will use harmonised definitions and concepts that are relevant to data suppliers. In particular, they will use those harmonised definitions for surveys, as produced by the Government

Statistical Service, unless there are good reasons for doing otherwise. Data suppliers will be informed how and when the results of an enquiry will be published.

25. To widen the range and quality of statistics available without involving fresh collection burdens, Central and Local Government will investigate the possibility of developing administrative series into National Statistics.
26. A high level of response to enquiries is essential in order to obtain good quality national estimates and both parties will strive to achieve this. Central and Local Government will meet their statutory obligations with respect to data provision and will make every effort to meet the requirements of non-statutory requirements, taking into account the uses to which these data will be put.

## Data transfer

27. Local and central Government will work in partnership to ensure the most effective and efficient transmission of data both from local government to central government, and from central government to local government. They will set targets for and work towards increased electronic transmission of data, in line with Modernising Government targets for electronic government.

## Data quality

28. Central and Local Government recognise that the quality and fitness for purpose of the data are essential in ensuring that work is authoritative and respected. Relevance, accuracy, timeliness, clarity, coherence, accessibility and consistency

must all be addressed for this to be achieved.

29. Central and Local Government will ensure when they make data available to the public, and to each other, that they report on the quality of the data, look to address issues that arise that affect the quality of the data they provide or produce, and actively strive to improve the quality of their data within resource constraints.

## Geography

30. Geographic referencing offers key benefits for the analysis, presentation and easy handling of small area statistics. Local authorities and central government departments will strive to adopt consistent geographic referencing at all levels of spatial aggregation in order to achieve the full potential of information.
31. When standard information is published electronically, central government departments will as far as possible include standard codes (and not rely on names alone). Where this is not possible, publishers will supply a separate table providing a verified translation between the names (or departmental codes) and the standard codes.
32. Producers of information in local and central government will seek to use the Census Output Areas, introduced following the 2001 Census, as the standard small area geographic 'building bricks' in relevant future outputs. ONS will undertake to maintain the integrity of Census Output Areas so that they are of continued relevance for the next decade, fit with Output Areas for a 2011 Census, and seek to have other boundaries conform with them.

# **ANNEX A:**

## **Central and Local Government Information Partnership (CLIP): purpose, aims and structure**

CLIP has been operating in its current form since a review in 1997 following a number of initiatives. These included the central-local government partnership, signed by the Deputy-Prime Minister and the Chairman of the Local Government Association; and the Local Government Association's Policy Agenda for Statistics and Intelligence.

CLIP's purpose is: "To enable central and local government to work together to develop an efficient and effective infrastructure for policy development, implementation, monitoring and reporting." It operates at a strategic level, taking a holistic approach to identify key issues and priorities and acting as a sounding board. The group provides a valuable forum for the consideration of important cross-cutting issues affecting the Government Statistical Service.

It aims to identify and consider needs for non-financial statistical and related information to support government policies and initiatives affecting central and local government. It looks to provide guidance, encourage good practice and where possible, identify solutions to common problems. In addition, it fosters communication between the different parts of central and local government to encourage better common understanding of statistical and related issues.

Direction for CLIP is provided by a Steering Group, which is supported by a number of sub-groups, that play an important role in undertaking core activities, and taskforces which tackle cross-cutting issues. Topics

covered include:

- Census
- Deprivation
- Education
- Housing
- Labour Market
- Personal Social Services
- Health
- Planning
- Population
- Transport

# ANNEX B:

## Working Group on Local Government Financial Statistics (WGLGFS)

WGLGFS has been in existence for many years, and was formerly part of the framework of the Consultative Council on Local Government Finance (CCLGF). Since 1998 it has become more freestanding, and it amended its manner of operation in 2000, following discussions between DTLR and the LGA. The membership consists of representatives from central government departments, local authority associations, CIPFA, and the Audit Commission. The group meets once a year.

The main aims of WGLGFS are:

1. to ensure as far as possible that ODPM's collection of financial statistics from local authorities meets the needs of local and central government;
2. to report information on local authority budgets and provide a common data set for use by local authorities, local authority associations and central government;
3. to provide a forum for the discussion of other relevant local government finance data issues. In 2001, these included:
  - financial and related information collected by other departments
  - electronic data collection

- CIPFA's Best Value Accounting Code of Practice

WGLGFS is supported by one sub-group, the sub-group on forms, which typically meets twice a year. The sub-group scrutinises and agrees changes to ODFM's forms which collect financial statistics from local authorities.

# ANNEX C:

## Extract from National Statistics Code of Practice – Statement of Principles (issued September 2002)

### Key principle 5. Protecting confidentiality

*Where data are collected or used for statistical purposes, we guarantee to protect confidentiality.*

- a) The National Statistician will set standards for protecting confidentiality, including a guarantee that no statistics will be produced that are likely to identify an individual unless specifically agreed with them.
- b) Data provided for National Statistics will only be used for statistical purposes.
- c) Everyone involved in the production of National Statistics will be made aware of their obligations to protect provider confidentiality and of the legal penalties likely to apply to wrongful disclosure. These obligations will continue to apply after completion of service.
- d) Data identifying individuals will be kept physically secure. Access will require authorisation and will only be allowed when the Head of Profession is satisfied the data will be used exclusively for justifiable research and that the information is not reasonably obtainable elsewhere.

- e) Where information identifying individuals must be given up by law, it will be released only under the explicit direction and on the personal responsibility of the National Statistician.
- f) The same confidentiality standards will apply to data derived from administrative sources as apply to those collected specifically for statistical purposes.
- g) Respondents will be informed of the main intended uses and access limitations applying to the information they provide to statistical inquiries.

Protocol

*Data Access and Confidentiality*



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