**A memo for the Crime and Justice Transparency Sector Panel:**

**13th March 2012**

**Summary:**

This memo has been drafted by Dan Lewis of the Economic Policy Centre and Director of UKCrimeStats.

It is a reflection of his experience and frustration at the apparent lack of consideration and forethought shown by the Home Office and other authorities to the crowding out of 3rd party crime data platforms and apps released (both mobile and web) based on the official crime data and the growing penetration of i) government-sponsored websites run by a private company – Rock Kitchen Harris – [www.police.uk](http://www.police.uk) who are also releasing and have first sight of the data (and not releasing all of it) and consequently many more internet hits and visitors. And ii) the newer website run by Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) which launched a rival Crime and Policing Comparator <http://www.hmic.gov.uk/crime-and-policing-comparator/> now fully integrated into Police.uk. There was recently a further website <http://crimemaps.btp.police.uk/> produced by RKH with only a small fraction of the underlying data released and directly linked into police.uk. It appears that RKH are running rings round the government and have secured a massive commercial advantage for themselves at the expense of taxpayers and the evolving open data marketplace.

According to the published minutes of the Crime and Justice Transparency Sector Panel, this monopoly access (first use and discriminatory) of the data is to be further entrenched on [www.police.uk](http://www.police.uk) with its forthcoming release of justice outcome mapping. It is the author’s belief that this example of monopoly access, provision and crowding out of the private sector serves as a microcosm for all the other existing and future datasets to be released by government of what not to do. With the introduction of Elected Police and Crime Commissioners planned for later this year, it is essential than independent crime data developers be allowed to thrive in an openly free and competitive environment, unimpeded by unfairly competing government websites.

**About UKCrimeStats** – [www.ukcrimestats.com](http://www.ukcrimestats.com) – UKCrimeStats is an open data platform fully owned by the Economic Policy Centre. It is the leading independent crime ranking and heatmap platform for constituencies, neighbourhoods, Police Forces and Streets with maps, analysis and reports. It is the only true aggregator of the crime data with a report generating function and as such constitutes an important independent source for measuring and finding errors in the crime data.

**About the Economic Policy Centre** – [www.economicpolicycentre.com](http://www.economicpolicycentre.com) – the EPC was launched in 2009 by Dan Lewis and Dr Tim Evans and brings together economic opinion formers - in academia, business, the media and government. Its vision is to close the gap between economic policy and knowledge in new and innovative ways.

**Table 1: The State of Crime Data Apps**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **App** | **Tax-funded** | **Private Sector** | **Aggregator** | **API** | **Other Unavailable Crime Data** | **Crime Only** | **Last updated** |
| UKCrimeStats | N | Y | Y | Y | N | Y | Mar-12 |
| Crime Rate Comparison | N | Y | N | Y | N | Y | Mar-12 |
| Police.uk Ruby Gem | Y | Y | N | Y | N | Y | Mar-12 |
| Police.uk | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Mar-12 |
| Police.uk Mobile | Y | Y | N | Y | N | Y | Mar-12 |
| UK Crime View | Y | N | Y | Y | N | Y | Mar-12 |
| Crime Spy UK | N | Y | N | Y | N | Y | Feb-12 |
| Crime Locator | N | Y | N | Y | N | Y | Nov-11 |
| FINDaPAD | N | Y | N | Y | N | N | Nov-11 |
| Surrey Police Beat | Y | N | N | N | Y | Y | Nov-11 |
| Crime Map UK | N | Y | N | Y | N | Y | Nov-11 |
| Bobbies | N | Y | N | Y | N | Y | Oct-11 |
| Crime Finder | N | Y | N | Y | N | Y | Oct-11 |
| iphone Crime Map(UK) | N | Y | N | Y | N | Y | May-11 |
| php curl wrapper | N | Y | N | Y | N | Y | Feb-11 |
| London Crime Heatmap | N | Y | Y | N | N | Y | Jan-11 |
| Crimes Near Me | N | Y | N | Y | N | Y | discontinued |
| Keep Me Safe | N | Y | N | Y | N | Y | discontinued |

RKH who release the data to 3rd party developers via crimemapper have been allowed to compete in the mobile and web market for crime data software with negative consequences for privately-funded developers – as this declining level of private sector participation shows.

**Table 2: What UKCrimeStats does better than Police.uk**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Feature** | **Police.uk** | **UKCrimeStats** |
| National Picture Page | N | Y |
| August Riots Geospatial Analysis Page | N | Y |
| Monthly and Annual Reports | N | Y |
| 43 Police Forces core crime figures on 1 page | N | Y |
| 573 Constituency pages with figures and charts | N | Y |
| National Neighbourhood page with latest month data | N | Y |
| National Street page with latest month data | N | Y |
| National Subdivision page – nearly all political boundaries each with an individual page | N | Y |
| Crime Data Forum | N | Y |
| Google satellite street view | N | Y |
| 7 million plus QR codes – for every page and every crime | N | Y |
| Search: matching Force, Officer Name, Constituency / MP, Crime ID, Subdivisions, Postcode District, Postcode Sector, Schools, Transport Stations, Points of Interest | N | Y |
| Export ordered data to excel – 573 constituencies, 1,000 schools, 5,000 plus neighbourhoods and many more) | N | Y |
| Moving Crime Heatmap by any postcode in England and Wales – from Dec 10 to present | N | Y |
| Analysis page: Which Force, Neighbourhood, Subdivision, Travel Station etc. had the biggest increase between 2 points in time in percent or in total? | N | Y |
| Crime Reports: What was the total (exportable & sortable results) number of crimes between 2 timepoints for London Tube/Rail Stations, Selected Points of Interest, Postcode District, School Area or Transport Area? | N | Y |

**What’s gone wrong;**

1. **A formal lack of Data Governance**

It was a great achievement to get 43 Police Forces releasing data once a month. We do note however that both RKH and NPIA appear seemingly powerless in persuading Police Forces to correct data or at least check it. We would like to see rules established that would lead to all Police Forces complying with - for example – not changing neighbourhood codes (e.g. Scarborough SNT became Scarborough) extracting crime data on the same day of every month, not putting no location crimes in the street files, not silently changing the files etc.

1. **Incomplete and Incoherent Data**

We would like to see Police Forces take responsibility for the data that is put out under their name and complete all the data fields that are available. At the moment for example, the following Police Forces are reporting no lat/lngs for any of their Police Stations which means they can’t be displayed; Wiltshire Police, North Yorkshire Police, Gloucestershire Constabulary, Derbyshire Constabulary. We estimate we have only two-thirds of all Police Stations.

On incoherent or dirty data, here is an example of what has been input into the field entitled “rank” – for the rank of Police Officer;

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **policeforce** | **rank** | **count(\*)** |
| avon-and-somerset | Safer Bristol Community Safety Officer | 16 |
| bedfordshire | PS | 2 |
| cambridgeshire | Community Cohesion Unit | 12 |
| city-of-london | PS | 12 |
| derbyshire | SO | 9 |
| devon-and-cornwall | PS | 374 |
| devon-and-cornwall | Superintendent | 2 |
| dorset | PS | 136 |
| essex | Neighbourhood Watch Co-Ordinator | 1 |
| essex | PS | 20 |
| gloucestershire | INSO | 8 |
| gloucestershire | PS | 36 |
| gwent | PS | 196 |
| hampshire | Mr | 35 |
| hampshire | Mrs | 5 |
| hampshire | Ms | 6 |
| hampshire | PS | 327 |
| lancashire | Default Contact | 8 |
| merseyside | Birkenhead Town Centre (Cop Shop) Dedicated Consta | 1 |
| merseyside | Chinese Liaison Officer - South Area | 2 |
| merseyside | I joined Merseyside police in 1982 and have experi | 1 |
| merseyside | I joined Merseyside police in 1982 and have experienced a wide range of policing activities across t | 1 |
| merseyside | Liverpool University Officer | 2 |
| merseyside | My name is Kim Carter and I am the new Neighbourho | 1 |
| merseyside | Schools officer | 2 |
| merseyside | Schools Officer based at All Saints High School | 4 |
| merseyside | Schools Officer based at Kirkby Sports College | 4 |
| merseyside | Travel Community Support Officer | 2 |
| norfolk | Diversity Liaison officer | 54 |
| northumbria | Police Staff | 6 |
| nottinghamshire | Neighbourhood Warden | 10 |
| south-wales | FLSO | 2 |
| suffolk | 1628 | 2 |
| suffolk | 309 | 2 |
| suffolk | PS | 2 |
| sussex | PS | 15 |
| sussex | Safer Schools Officer (The Littlehampton Academy) | 16 |
| warwickshire | Mr | 2 |
| warwickshire | Mrs | 6 |
| warwickshire | Other | 2 |

1. **Silent Changing of Files**

For the December 2011 update, 7 million crimes and ASB incidents had their locations changed, most very slightly. At no stage was there any indication that this would happen or that it had happened. Other Police Forces have uploaded historical files that are at times substantially different in terms of the number of crimes recorded. The Home Office Crime Data Guidance says that there should be no silent changing of files but instead an upload alongside the old file and some explanation for the change. The Crime Data guidance states;

“*When errors are discovered, or files are changed for other reasons, rather than ‘silently’ changing the file it is recommended to publish a revised and differently named version (together with the original files), e.g. 02\_2011\_v2, 02\_2011\_v1.*”

Police.uk is not Home Office Crime Data Guidance compliant. UKCrimeStats is.

1. **Data errors**

As the only aggregators of the data with a report-generating function, we see these errors very quickly. However we have noticed that they are not picked up by the NPIA and take much longer – months – to be fixed. This costs us time and money for which we receive no thanks. We keep track of these on our forum <http://www.ukcrimestats.com/forum/> . Some of these errors are very badly wrong – December 2010 for Durham Constabulary shows a street crime total with geolocations of 2,119 compared to neighbourhood total of 5,770. This means that when we try and geolocate these crimes to a constituency for example, we show a 188% growth between Dec 2010 and Dec 2011 from 265 to 764 for the constituency of Sedgefield.

1. **Unfair competition**

This happens on several levels. First sight and first use of the data by government-sponsored website like police.uk, HMIC and British Transport Police is unacceptable. The role of government should be to release the data, keep close tabs on its quality and increase its quantity - not crowd out the marketplace by raising the barriers to entry for developers. The problem becomes more acute when additional datasets which are more complex are layered in on top and meshed into Police.uk such as the Points of Interest. This eventually leads to the monopoly position that now seems to be established. But if that was the aim, why were developers invited to spend their time and resource developing the data?

Secondly, political endorsement. It is not acceptable for the Police Minister to write in the Sunday Times or say on Radio 4’s today programme that listeners should go to Police.uk.

**28th October 2011** – On Radio 4’s Today Programme, Nick Herbert states that in terms of the capabilities of Police.uk ;

*“By the end of the year, the website will be able to list the specific places - such as football stadiums, parks and supermarkets - where crime and anti-social behaviour is concentrated.*

*By May, it will also be able to show what happened after a crime was reported to the police, and track its progress through the courts.”*

HMIC Crime and Policing Comparator is duly launched. It competes directly with a specific page on UKCrimeStats <http://www.ukcrimestats.com/Police_Forces/> because it allows the user to compare recorded crime and ASB events between Police Forces. Moreover, the Police Comparator had access to a range of datasets not released to 3rd party developers before its development.

City of London Population – adjusted for transience

Data measured over the financial year periods for 2008/09, 2009/10, 2010/11

A separate range of 173 crime codes incorporating greater granularity than the 10 released via Police.uk

Perception-based ASB data

Quality of service data

Victim satisfaction data

Solved crimes data

Force Finance data

Workforce number data

On Sunday 29th January Nick Herbert authored a piece for the Sunday Times that was again completely oblivious to competition and monopoly issues – saying;

"*Since its launch a year ago, police.uk has been an extraordinary success, receiving more than 450m hits. We have added information allowing comparisons of force performance. This week we will improve the data to start to show incidents in public places such as shopping areas, nightclubs and parks. Later this year we will add justice outcomes revealing whether a crime had a consequence - and what it was. We're making it easier for people to contact the police. Visit police.uk, type in your postcode and you will be shown your neighbourhood policing team and its direct contact details*"

Further competition issues;

* Incoming links to UKCrimeStats from government websites. These are the main source of referrals for UKCrimeStats. However, there is no clear method for deciding which order they are placed in – it is not alphabetical – UKCrimeStats however is placed at the bottom <http://www.police.uk/police-apps> .
* Monopoly provision – releasing an API and raw data simultaneously with an online platform. This is on-going and happens every month and Police.uk has first sight of the data and a big advantage because they can upload the data first to their website and receive more hits and visitors. This constitutes discriminatory access. They also frequently fail to make their deadline for releasing the data on the 25th of every month and offer no explanation or apology. This has knock-on effects further down the line for 3rd party developers.
* Every single page of Police.uk has a link to Rock Kitchen Harris – as a website with approximately 10,000 unique visitors a day and sometimes much more this is extremely valuable. The link takes you directly to <http://www.rkh.co.uk/crimemapper/> their CrimeMapper section – a field which potential 3rd party developers would like to compete in. So the Home Office are mistaken to believe that RKH have no commercial advantage under the current contract.
* The police.uk api page <http://www.police.uk/api/docs/> has a section at the bottom entitled;

**Need more help?**

RKH can provide additional API support and development on a commercial basis.

[Contact RKH](http://www.police.uk/api/docs/commercial/)

Therefore RKH have a vested interest in sub-optimal provision of the API because they can profit from doing so.

1. **Discriminatory access to the data**

A number of datasets have been held back and not released but are used by government-funded websites. These currently are;

1. Points of interest on Police.uk – purchased from Ordnance Survey
2. A host of datasets from British Transport Police
3. Photos of Police Officers – which are released on police.uk
4. Forthcoming Crime and Justice datasets
5. **Increased cost to the taxpayer**

The question that has to be asked every time government wants to develop a website / app with its own data is this;

*Why, especially in a time of austerity, should they use taxpayers money to do this when developers could do it for free and create private sector jobs and tax receipts?*

We estimate the combined cost of government-sponsored crime websites thus far must run to a large six figure number – which was not necessary.

1. **Non-communication with 3rd party developers**

Perhaps this is the biggest problem of all. As an example, in November 2011 – we are unsure when this happened because there was no communication with 3rd party developers. According to <http://www.police.uk/help> ;

*"In addition, we have also moved sexual offences from the ‘other crime’ category to ‘violent crime’*."

Does this mean they will be going back and retrofitting the previous month’s data?

Again there was a total failure here to communicate with 3rd party developers for something that can have a major impact on a crime database which will come at a cost. We still do not know which, where and when those crimes were.

**Why will UKCrimeStats and crime statistics be more valuable to the UK in the future?**

Major innovation is happening the world over with crime statistics. Thanks to major advances in computer power and social networking what can be done about crime is moving from one-way reactive to two-way pro-active and even predictive. With the onset of democratic control of Crime and Police Commissioners, there is a real need for independent collating and analysis of crime data.

UKCrimeStats has just releaseed the following capabilities;

Crime by all known administrative boundaries

Crime by postcode district

Crime by School and University area

Crime by different types of transport hub

Crime by Points of interest – coffee shops, TK Maxx, Petrol stations etc.

UKCrimeStats will also be able to show which Police Force, Neighbourhood, Point of Interest etc. had the biggest increase/decrease between 2 points in time of a selected crime or combination thereof.

UKCrimeStats will be able to show a heatmap anywhere in England and Wales within 0.5 – 3 miles of a given postcode over a given time period or just one month.

This week UKCrimeStats releases crime and ASB incidents by postcode sector.

UKCrimeStats intends to also overlay weather data to determine not just which of all the above had the most/least rain/sun etc. but then link that to crime and tease out the relationship.

However UKCrimeStats cannot continue to indefinitely invest in the platform without knowing whether it is always at risk of being crowded out or cut off by government providers operating in their own interests and regardless to 3rd party developers.

The experience of crime data provision in the UK is a good example – thus far - of how not to deliver a successful open data programme.

**Suggested Next Steps for crime data demonopolisation:**

* The Home Office needs to start by guaranteeing that it will not duplicate the existing capabilities of UKCrimeStats or any other 3rd party crime data developer.
* The Home Office should not integrate Crime and Justice outcomes into police.uk but only release the data to give 3rd party developers a chance to catch up
* It must then say that there wil be no further developments of Police.uk and the other sites - only crime data monthly updates
* Police.uk mobile app to be discontinued
* All existing datasets used but not released by government-sponsored crime websites must be made available
* It must then draw up a plan to row back from the marketplace, setting a date for not updating Police.uk, just uploading the data for download and letting – potentially - a thousand flowers bloom.