

# **UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY**

## **Minutes**

**Thursday 27 March 2025**  
**Newport Boardroom**

### **Members Present**

Sir Robert Chote (Chair)  
Dr. Jacob Abboud  
Peter Barron  
Professor Sir Ian Diamond  
Ed Humpherson  
Professor Dame Carol Propper  
Emma Rourke  
Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter  
Professor Mairi Spowage  
Dr. Sarah Walsh  
Penny Young

### **Other Attendees**

Heather Bovill (for item 10)  
June Bowman  
Kirsty Campion (for item 12)  
Mary Gregory (for item 11)  
Mike Keogh (for item 10)  
Alex Lambert (for item 10)  
Liz McKeown (for item 10)  
Sarah Moore  
Ruth Studley (for item 11)  
Natalie Tarr (for item 12)  
Tom Taylor

### **Secretariat**

Sally Jones

### **Apologies**

None

## **1. Apologies**

- 1.1 There were no apologies.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

- 2.1 There were no new declarations of interest.

## **3. Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings.**

- 3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 February were agreed.

## **4. Report from the Authority Chair [SA(25)13]**

- 4.1 Non-Executive Directors had met before the meeting. They had discussed topics including the review of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Transformed Labour Market Survey (TLFS).
- 4.2 The Chair welcomed Professor Mairi Spowage to her first Board meeting. It was noted that a comprehensive NED Induction programme had been delivered for newly appointed NEDs, Professor Spowage, Dr Sarah Walsh and Peter Barron.
- 4.3 The Chair reported on his recent activities since the Board last met. Sir Robert had received a crime briefing by John Marais (ONS) and the team. The work was relevant to the Government's mission, 'safer streets' and the Prime Minister's priority to address violence against women and girls. On 17 March Sir Robert alongside Professor Sir Ian Diamond had met with HM Treasury (HMT) to discuss ONS prioritisation and phase two of the Spending Review 2025 (SR25). On 19 March Sir Robert had addressed a joint meeting of the finance committees of the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Senedd and Northern Ireland Assembly.
- 4.4 The Chair informed the meeting that a joint review by the Authority Board and the Cabinet Office had been commissioned. The review would be led by Sir Robert Devereux, former Permanent Secretary at the Department for Work and Pensions. Discussions were ongoing with the Cabinet Office regarding the approach to communications.

## **5. Report from the Chief Executive [SA(25)14]**

- 5.1 Sir Ian provided the Board with an overview of activity and issues since the last meeting, highlighting the following:
- i. the year-end financial position 2024/25 was forecast to be a small under expenditure;
  - ii. business planning 2025/26 was near completion with the final ONS Business Plan scheduled for discussion at this meeting;
  - iii. work was ongoing by the finance team alongside the Senior Leadership Team on the second phase of the Spending Review 2025 (SR25). The mandated elements had been submitted to HMT and discussions were ongoing on the overall submission;
  - iv. Sir Ian had attended a meeting at No.10 to discuss the work of the ONS;
  - v. Sir Ian had attended the 56<sup>th</sup> United Nations Statistical Commission in New York alongside an ONS delegation. International partners had highlighted the positive impact of the work by ONS.
  - vi. the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) had completed a review of the Integrated Data Service (IDS) programme;
  - vii. the publication of the UK Trade Bulletin scheduled for 14 March had been delayed due to errors identified during quality assurance. The publication was now scheduled for 28 March;
  - viii. the report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) regarding ONS's Wealth statistics published in January, which had included implementing changes to the method for estimating Defined Benefit Pension Wealth, as recommended by a Government Actuary's Department Review. The methodology had been implemented after extensive engagement including the IFS;

- ix. as part of planned communications on the TLFS, ONS would be publishing a social survey recovery plan;
  - x. Sir Ian had provided a paper for the Civil Service Operations Board on Reproducible Analytical Pipelines (RAPs) and data sharing, which had been well received with a request for further detail on how RAPs positively impact efficiency; and
  - xi. progress by ONS to address the long-standing issue of delays to coronial data associated with drug related deaths. Emma Rourke continued to work with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to maintain progress.
- 5.2 The Board heard that Sir Ian was scheduled to meet Georgia Gould, Parliamentary Secretary at the Cabinet Office early April to discuss topics including the recommendation for the future of population and migration statistics, following discussion at this meeting. Within her role, Georgia holds responsibility for Authority sponsorship.
- 5.3 Sir Ian would be taking on the role of Chair of the United Nation Economic Commission for Europe Statistics Group.
- 5.4 Members discussed the update. There were a number of issues, which highlighted the need for a more comprehensive communications strategy to respond to media coverage. It was noted that the publication of the ONS Business Plan in April would provide the opportunity to set out ONS's key priorities. With regard to delays to statistical publications the number had reduced slightly in comparison to the previous year. There had been no change in the number of minor errors over the last year and quality assurance processes were identifying issues before publication. The issues raised by the IPA Review of the IDS were a cause for concern and related in part to the long-standing challenge of data sharing. As part of SR25, the Treasury Approval Panel for IDS was scheduled in the coming weeks.
- 6. Report from the Director General for Regulation [SA(25)15]**
- 6.1 Ed Humpherson provided an update on regulation activity noting that he agreed that the IFS Report regarding ONS Wealth Statistics was a methodological choice by ONS and not an error.
- 6.2 The Board heard that Regulation Committee had considered OSR's Review of Economic Statistics produced by the ONS. The draft report had been provided to ONS for comment and discussions were ongoing with the aim of publishing early April. OSR had written to ONS following its assessment of its practice of releasing market sensitive economic data outside of market trading hours at 07.00, supporting its plans to continue at that time. OSR had written to Tony Dent in response to correspondence about inflation statistics.
- 6.3 The independent review of data, statistics and research on sex and gender led by Professor Alice Sullivan had been published by the Department of Science Innovation and Technology on 19 March. Following a request from Professor Alice Sullivan a meeting would be scheduled with Ed Humpherson and Sir Robert regarding findings.
- 7. Report from the Chair of Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**
- 7.1 The Chair reported on the work of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee which had last met on 13 March.
- 7.2 The Committee had considered:
- i. the financial position of the organisation and assurance on the forecast year end position;
  - ii. business planning 2025/26 and preparations for SR25 phase two;
  - iii. an update on the current strategic risk profile and the refreshed profile;
  - iv. delivery of the Internal Audit Plan 2024/25;

- v. Internal Audit Reports on Evergreen IT, Artificial Intelligence and RAP Migration;
- vi. the draft Internal Audit Plan 2025/26; and
- vii. the External Audit Planning timetable 2024/25

## **8. Report from the Chair of Regulation Committee**

8.1 The Chair reported on the work of the Regulation Committee which had last met on 20 March.

8.2 The Committee had considered:

- i. the review of Economic Statistics produced by ONS;
- ii. the review of ONS statistics from the Wealth and Assets Survey;
- iii. the review of ONS UK Trade Statistics, which had been de-accredited in 2014;
- iv. emerging findings from the review of the adequacy of UK wide comparable statistics and data; and
- v. the development of OSR's strategy and business plan.

## **9. ONS Business Plan and Spending Review 2025 update[SA(25)16]**

9.1 Tom Taylor introduced the final draft of the ONS Business Plan 2025/26 and an update on the second phase of SR25.

9.2 The Board had provided feedback on the draft business plan in February. The final plan included further detail on the challenges posed by the financial context and the need for careful prioritisation.

9.3 Board members discussed the draft plan, noting that it clearly set out the balance between opportunity and challenge. The options analysis on making responses to surveys mandatory could help as part of the longer-term strategic approach to addressing survey response rates. The impact of inflation on survey costs was noted and the continuing need for surveys. Business statistics could be used to help understand the issues around participation. The reference to legacy transformation, link to statistical quality issues and the impact of reducing the pace of the work could be clearer.

9.4 The Board endorsed the business plan subject to the comments made. Publication of the plan was scheduled in April. The final submission of SR25 on 10 April would include the options analysis on making response to surveys mandatory.

## **10. Transformed Labour Force Survey [SA(25)17]**

10.1 Alex Lambert and Liz McKeown introduced a paper which sought approval for the way forward on the Transformed Labour Force Survey project and Labour Force Survey (LFS). Since July 2024, the TLFS project had focused on testing and refining the TLFS design, mitigating key delivery risks in parallel and continuing to improve the quality of the existing LFS survey. To support decision making on the future of the TLFS an investment appraisal had been conducted. Options had been assessed against the ability to meet user data quality requirements, feasibility/risk of delivery, long-term viability, time, cost, affordability and value for money.

10.2 The recommendation by the National Statistician to the Board was based on a discussion and decision by the Executive Committee on 24 March. The Board was invited to consider and approve the recommendation to implement TLFS improvements and then transition to using TLFS for labour market statistics (option C in the paper).

10.3 The Board heard that the recommended option would implement the improved TLFS design at the earliest operationally feasible point, relying on an improved LFS for labour market data until the TLFS was assured. External academics, the Stakeholder Advisory Panel and the Labour Market Technical Group had endorsed the

recommended option. Key stakeholders, HMT, the Bank of England and Office for Budget Responsibility had also endorsed the recommended option as the preferred way forward in a recent meeting with Professor Sir Ian Diamond.

- 10.4 Development of the TLFS improved design had been informed by the short-core tests (LMX) combined with extensive user engagement and technical assurance. The new TLFS design would comprise a short longitudinal core labour market focused survey taking an average of 15 minutes to complete delivered online first, supplemented by targeted telephone or face to face contact for non-responders. This would be complemented by a separate cross-sectional 'Plus' survey to provide wider socioeconomic, household and local data.
- 10.5 Members discussed the recommendation fully. The following points were made in discussion:
- i. the importance of taking a data-led approach to achieving pace while still ensuring appropriate data quality and managing remaining uncertainty, as indicated by the previous lessons learned from the past on TLFS;
  - ii. the assurance provided by the data quality, sustainability and value for money assessments that had been undertaken against the measures of success, which supported the recommended option as the strongest and was the preference of users and senior stakeholders;
  - iii. further detail on the LMX test results and a comparison of LMX with the TLFS, which provided assurance to the Board on the recommended option;
  - iv. the approach to mitigating key delivery risks to address the remaining challenges including managing the impact of survey change and improvements to the data capture of complex variables, specifically industrial and occupational classifications. It was noted that interviewers had been included in the process to address data capture of complex variables;
  - v. the ambition for transition onto the TLFS within 2026, with an acknowledgment that the timeframe may move if ONS's or critical users' assessment was that more data was required to be collected and assessed. As such, the optimal timing of transition would be data-led and require consideration of acceptable trade-offs to balance both timeliness and quality;
  - vi. the need to address the long-term model for surveys going forward and the link to survey mandation; and
  - vii. the need to consider the content and timing of planned communications currently scheduled for 8 April. The communications would include a full acknowledgment of the issues that had to be addressed.
- 10.6 The Board endorsed the recommendation to implement TLFS improvements and then transition to using TLFS for labour market statistics (Option C). The Board noted that communications should be clear about the ambition for delivery of published headline labour market statistics. The communications could set out a window for delivery rather than a specific date. As discussed, the decision would be evidenced based and data led and may be later than November 2026.
- 10.7 On behalf of the Board Sir Robert noted thanks to Mike Keoghan for all of his achievements as Director General for Economic, Social and Environmental Statistics. He was leaving ONS to join the Ellison Institute of Technology.

## **11. Future of Population and Migration Statistics Recommendation [SA(25)18]**

- 11.1 As this area of work is policy in development, the minute from this item will be published upon completion.

## **12. Strategic Risk Profile [SA(25)19]**

- 12.1 Natalie Tarr and Kirsty Campion introduced a paper which provided an update on the strategic risk profile following strategic risk workshops with Executive and Non-Executive Directors and discussion by the Executive Committee (ExCo) and the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC).
- 12.2 The strategic risk profile demonstrates the most significant risk to the successful delivery of the Authority strategy and its strategic objectives. Following a review of the strategic risk profile a number of changes were proposed, particularly to the quality risks, which had been an area of challenge and a key focus of ExCo and ARAC over the last year. A more nuanced approach to the assessment of quality risks was proposed: SR3 'Quality Statistics' would focus on the quality management framework; the introduction of a new economic statistics risk - SR7 'Quality economic statistics' and the refresh of SR9 to focus on the end-to-end production of quality population statistics.
- 12.3 Board members discussed the refreshed risk profile and highlighted the lack of a specific risk on reputation, which formed part of both SR6 'Communications' and SR0 'Independence, trustworthiness and impact' and would also feature in the new economic statistics risk, SR7. It was noted that SR12 'Technological resilience' was at the top end of risk appetite with future legacy plans being developed in line with the spending review process and available funding.
- 12.4 The Board endorsed the refreshed strategic risk profile and agreed that a further discussion would be scheduled to discuss SR0 'Independence, trustworthiness and impact'.

## **13. Any Other Business**

- 13.1 The Board would next meet on 24 April 2025.

**UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY**  
**Agenda**  
**Thursday 27 March 2025, 12.00-15.00**  
**Newport Boardroom, Hybrid Meeting**

**Chair:** Sir Robert Chote

**Apologies:** None

**Attendees:** Kirsty Campion (for item 9), Megan Cooper (for item 6), Alex Lambert (for item 7), Mary Gregory (for item 8), Liz McKeown (for item 7), Ruth Studley (for item 8), Natalie Tarr (for item 9)

**NED Session:** 11.00-12.00

1 12:00-12:05 5 mins	Minutes and matters arising from previous meeting Declarations of interest	Meeting of 27 February 2025
2 12:05-12:15 10 mins	Report from the Authority Chair	SA(25)13 Sir Robert Chote
3 12:15-12:45 30 mins	Report from the Chief Executive	SA(25)14 Prof. Sir Ian Diamond
4 12:45-12:55 10 mins	Report from the Director General for Regulation	SA(25)15 Ed Humpherson
5 12:55-13:05 10 mins	Report from Committee Chair <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Audit and Risk Assurance Committee</li> <li>Regulation Committee</li> </ul>	Oral update Dr Jacob Abboud Prof. Dame Carol Propper
6 13:05-13:20 15 mins	ONS Business Plan & Spending Review 2025 update	SA(25)16 Tom Taylor Megan Cooper
13:20-13:30 10 mins	Break	
7 13:30-14:10 40 mins	Transformed Labour Force Survey/Labour Force Survey	SA(25)17 Alex Lambert Liz McKeown
8 14:10-14:35 25 mins	Recommendation on the Future of Population and Migration Statistics	SA(25)18 Emma Rourke Ruth Studley Mary Gregory
9 14:35-14:55 20 mins	Strategic Risk Profile	SA(25)19 Natalie Tarr Kirsty Campion
10 14:55-15:00 5 mins	Any Other Business	

**Next meeting: Thursday 24 April, London Boardroom**

***Chair's Report, March 2025***

**Purpose**

1. This paper provides the Authority Board with an overview of the Chair's activity in February and March.

**Review of Recent Activities**

2. On 26 February, just after our last meeting, I was given a briefing on the landscape of crime statistics led by John Marais and the various opportunities and pressures ahead for his team.
3. On 17 March I attended a meeting along with some of the executive team at HM Treasury, where we discussed Phase 2 of the Spending Review, prioritisation within the Office for National Statistics, and the Office for Statistics Regulation's upcoming Review of Economic Statistics.
4. On 19 March, I addressed a joint meeting of the finance committees of the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Senedd and Northern Ireland Assembly.
5. On 20 March, I met with Tony Dent and colleagues from Better Statistics to discuss issues arising from the UK Statistics Assembly.
6. I also held my regular catch-ups with the National Statistician, Director General for Regulation and Deputy Director of Strategy and Policy.

**Correspondence**

7. On 14 February I responded to a letter from Mark Griffin MSP, about figures used by the Scottish Government for approved planning applications where houses had not been completed.

**Sir Robert Chote, 20 March 2025**



***Chief Executive's Report, March 2025***

**Purpose**

1. This provides the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) with an overview of activity since the last Board meeting on 27 February 2025.

**Summary**

2. Our business planning and Spending Review (SR) activities are drawing to a conclusion. This includes details of our key milestones being presented within the final draft Strategic Business Plan 2025/26 for consideration by the Board. With budgets confirmed for next year and milestones in place we can issue financial delegations to Directors General in advance of the new financial year. The mandated elements of the SR Phase 2 were submitted to HM Treasury on 25 February.
3. It was a great privilege to attend the 56th United Nations Statistical Commission in New York earlier this month, alongside a strong Office for National Statistics (ONS) delegation. This event marks an important milestone in influencing the development of statistical standards and to shape statistical policy in line with the UK's priorities.
4. Our work on the production and dissemination of Economic Statistics continues to be one of our foremost priorities. This includes the ongoing transformation of our Labour Force Survey, on which I have held positive conversations with our key stakeholders as we plot a course of action for the coming months. I was thrilled to see the publication of the Public Services Productivity Review earlier in March and look forward to the showcase event on 2 April.

**Finance, Planning and Performance**

5. Turning to 2025/26, details of budgetary allocations were presented to the Board in January, and key milestones for 2025/26 are included within the final draft Strategic Business Plan 2025/26 for consideration by the Board. The plan reflects the outcome of careful consideration of priorities, previously discussed at the Board, paying particular attention to the settlement conditions imposed by HM Treasury. With budgets confirmed for next year and milestones in place we can issue financial delegations to Directors General in advance of the new financial year.
6. Looking to 2026/27 and beyond, the mandated elements of SR Phase 2 were submitted to HM Treasury on 25 February complying with the terms of the commission. In early March, attention turned to the provision of additional submission materials including the revised Future Population Migration Statistics (FPMS) and Integrated Data Service (IDS) business cases plus costings for investment options. We continue to work with HM Treasury colleagues to answer questions on our overall submission and prepare for Treasury Approval Panels (for FPMS and IDS) in the coming weeks.
7. The Legal and Data Services team have been working with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) and the Data Use and Access bill team on drafting instructions for potential amendments, including those around a data dictionary, the key point we have been making is the need for the National Statistician to maintain his ability to set definitions etc, as per the Statistics and Registration Services Act.
8. The UK Statistics Authority (the Authority) is responding to a commission from the Cabinet Office on their future legislation strategy for the remainder of the parliament, this asks that we put on ministers' radar any legislation which we might need between now and the end of the Parliament.
9. The next Research Accreditation Panel (RAP) meeting will be held on 31 March, this will be chaired by Professor Paul Boyle, a strategic workshop will follow the meeting, which

will be attended by Emma Rourke and Pete Benton and will be looking at some of the bigger challenges facing the RAP processes and what improvements could be made.

10. On 11 March, Government Statistical Service (GSS) Heads of Profession met at their quarterly forum to discuss relevant topics including progress against the GSS vision, the upcoming refresh of the Authority strategy, the Lievesley recommendation related to the role of the National Statistician and the bi-annual update from the People Advisory Group.
11. An engagement plan for improving the sense of community across the GSS has been signed off by the GSS Deputy Heads. This plan is now being actioned and will support to increase the visibility of the vision, leadership, communities and expertise for members of the GSS and external stakeholders.
12. Grant Fitzner gave evidence to the Lords Home-based Working Committee earlier this month, discussing what the statistics show on remote and hybrid working by industry and individual characteristics and the impact on productivity.
13. The Cabinet Office response to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) inquiry on Transforming the UK's Evidence Base was published, with the Government rejecting three of the recommendations. In the conclusion of their response, it noted that: "The Government wishes to assure the Committee that it remains committed to better use and increased sharing of data across government and is reinvigorating the design of the digital centre for the government to deliver on this commitment. The Government will also continue to engage with the UK Statistics Authority on the collection and use of data to enable the effective and efficient provision of public services."
14. The Review conducted by Professor Alice Sullivan was published by DSIT on 19 March and explores the collection of data on sex and gender and how this has been conducted over time by different organisations across topic areas. The Review makes recommendations to both the ONS and the Authority, including about the approach to user engagement and sharing of information relating to question development. The Review also provides reflections on organisational culture.

### **Economic, Social and Environment Group**

15. It was announced earlier this month that Deputy National Statistician and Director General for Economic, Social and Environmental Statistics, Mike Keoghan, will be leaving ONS. During his three years at ONS, Mike has overseen the delivery of complex transformation across ONS's Economic, Social and Environmental Statistics (ESEG) portfolio. Mike's last day will be Monday 31 March. A recruitment campaign for a permanent replacement has been launched, and temporary arrangements have been communicated to all staff confirming I will be providing oversight to ESEG during the transition, with Directors absorbing responsibilities in the interim period.
16. An ONS fellow funded by the British Academy has been supporting us investigating 'Hidden Innovators' in the UK economy. Those businesses that may not have been identified through traditional definitions or survey methods, to help understand the true scale of innovation in the UK. An event on the 26 March will discuss the results and gather expert feedback to inform the development of a publication.
17. Following close working with the Bank of England, the Financial Sector Accounts and International Development project have published for the first time two new datasets on financial assets, an important step to meeting our international commitments and improving the availability of data for assessing financial stability. Alongside this, in partnership with teams from across the ONS, we launched a revamped Financial Services Survey to a limited number of companies, enabling us to learn from that launch

as we progress towards filling other key data gaps and meeting our international commitments.

18. The National Statistician's Review of the Measurement of Public Services Productivity was published on 13 March, a once in a generation opportunity to improve the measurement of public services productivity. Improvements to data and methods have been incorporated for the next annual statistical release on 27 March. This will be followed by a showcase event on 2 April that will bring together a wide range of external stakeholders. Numerous recommendations have also been made to build on these improvements.
19. The UK Trade Bulletin scheduled for 14 March was delayed because of errors identified during quality assurance in trade in services estimates and the previously announced HM Revenue and Customs trade in goods data error. This release will now be published on 28 March including the full suite of corrected trade in goods and services data, alongside the balance of payments and quarterly national accounts releases.
20. The annual update to the Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH) weights and basket of items for consumer prices is being introduced in March. We have also made significant progress in taking ourselves off legacy IT systems for the production of both consumer and house price statistics and have put through numerous improvements to Consumer Prices Index (CPI) imputation methods.
21. The Data Science Campus (DSC) and Population Statistics Division are due to submit a report on the viability of using Advanced Passenger Information for long term international migration of European Union and British nationals; this will form the basis of the recommendation on establishing a lasting data share between ONS and the Home Office
22. DSC concluded the final cohort of the Data Science Graduate Programme, with a cohort of over 200 graduating the programme. The programme sought to increase data science and artificial intelligence skills across government, including retraining existing civil servants. The programme was defunded following 2024/25 business planning.
23. The Prices Project is on-track to move Consumer Price statistics to a new cloud-based system, which will significantly reduce reliance on aged infrastructure and increase the resilience of the Consumer Prices monthly production round. The new system has also enabled the implementation of a range of new improved methods. These changes will be incorporated into headline consumer price statistics on 26 March.

### **Health, Population and Methods**

24. We are setting up a National Statistician's Advisory Panel on Migration Statistics. Interviews for the Chair took place in March and member recruitment will follow.
25. There have been two corrections published for outputs produced by the Population Statistics Directorate. The two issues relate to small area population estimates, where there was an issue in the processing of the conversion from old output areas to new; and travel trends data where an update to the 2023 editions was incorrectly uploaded to the wrong location making the 2019-2023 data unavailable to users. Neither of the corrections occurred for our most high-profile outputs, and the impacts have been limited.
26. I was honoured to lead the UK delegation to the 56th United Nations Statistical Commission in New York, with the International Relations Team coordinating input from across the department. This enabled us to achieve key objectives on the new System of National Accounts, strengthen our partnerships internationally, and showcase ONS's work on topics including citizen data, climate and health, and international quality

standards. We also received support for our work on Data Science, Future of National Statistical Offices, Beyond Gross Domestic Product and Wellbeing Measurement.

27. The response from Ministry of Justice (MoJ) to our options paper on sharing coroner data is still outstanding. We have set MoJ a hard deadline to respond to our paper, at which point we will escalate the issue more formally in the department if no response is received with the aim of reaching a conclusion to the issue soon.
28. We published an ad-hoc release on 5 March on the change in mean earnings and percentage of people employed with time to/since surgery, among people who had orthopaedic surgery for a musculoskeletal diagnosis. This was published in response to requests for such data from the Department of Health and Social Care/NHS England in advance of the SR.
29. Colleagues from Methods and Quality Directorate, DSC and FPMS visited the Met Office in early March. The visit was to establish links and grow a deeper understanding of the two organisations, identify shared scientific challenge, opportunities for knowledge sharing and collaboration.

### **Data Capability Group**

30. The Infrastructure and Projects Authority Gateway review of the IDS has been conducted. The report will be finalised next week and includes focus on external blockers to success on data sharing in government and approval processes. It also recognises the service is fully functional with powerful data assets available for harnessing now.
31. Positive cross government collaboration continues on child fuel poverty, with access to the data and a range of government users largely all in the place, and with testing and analysis underway to make it a success. Minister Georgia Gould has invited Pete Benton to provide a demonstration of the IDS in the next few weeks following a session in Sheffield.
32. We have completed valuable data linkage to enable the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government to publish new analysis on households experiencing repeat homelessness and characteristics associated with this, which helps local and central government put in place more tailored support.

### **Operations Group**

33. We have launched our new People Portal – a one-stop shop for human resources (HR) policies and guidance. The design and content of the new People Portal provides seamless access to a wide range of HR information, making it easier to find the support and resources needed. All colleagues should use the People Portal as their first stop for HR information. In the four weeks since launch, the portal has had over 20,000 page views and is averaging 220 unique users per day. Users who have provided feedback give the portal average scores of 4.4 (out of 5) for both accessibility and style.
34. We continue to receive excellent feedback on our activity to engage the public in ONS's use of data. Our latest 'Bringing Data to Life' webinar focused on the misuse of statistics, including presentations from ONS colleagues and the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). 672 people attended from a variety of backgrounds and Full Fact shared the YouTube video to further extend our reach. We used the opportunity of British Science Week (7 to 16 March) to champion statistics and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects in schools and colleges, with ONS colleagues encouraged to use our Navigating Numbers resources to engage students on how and why we use data to create statistics.
35. A field scale up plan has increased the number of field interviewing staff from 540 in December 2023 to 713 in March 2025. Work is continuing to improve recruitment and retention into next financial year, with good progress being shown using a new strategic

resourcing model to reach a stretch target of 200 new interviewers by end of May 2025, and aiming to cover all demand by March 2026. This increase has enabled us to recover the Labour Force Survey Wave 1 to pre-pandemic levels, with a 28 per cent increase in achieved interviews since October 2023, and an increased sample size for the Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF) with key retail price index requirements now being met.

36. The first Social Survey-specific targeted communications campaign is now live in Birmingham, including broadcast video on demand and digital billboards. Metrics are not yet available to assess its impact, but we have received positive initial feedback through both interviewer evaluation and respondent follow-up surveys.
37. A suite of innovative trials and research have also been completed, including an LCF digital diary alpha trial; and more novel incentives research to increase response, decrease levels of partials within households and encourage earlier returns on the Transformed Labour Force Survey.

**Professor Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician, 20 March 2025**

*Update from the Director General for Regulation*

**Purpose**

1. This paper provides the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) with an overview of Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) activities.

**Discussion**

2. Our main areas of focus since the last Board meeting have been:
  - i. **Refreshing the Code of Practice for Statistics:** Our consultation on the Code closed on 14 February. We are reviewing the 61 responses, alongside input from stakeholder sessions that we ran during the consultation period. On 20 March we will provide an update to the Regulation Committee on the number and breadth of responses, along with a summary of findings. We plan to prepare a refined version of Code 3.0 for review by the Authority Board later in the summer; and
  - ii. **OSR Strategy and Spending Review:** We have provided our Zero Based Review to Treasury and are engaging widely around the strategy, allowing space to hear from a range of stakeholders.
3. We have recently published:
  - i. on 21 February, OSR's Statistics Regulator and Economist, Jonathan Price [published a think piece](#) on value and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), exploring the nature of value people get from some personal activities. The aim was to explore what aspects of our engagement with the natural world can be properly measured and expressed in monetary terms;
  - ii. On 25 February, [we published a report](#) on health inequalities statistics in the UK. The report provides information on the currently available data and statistics, identifies existing gaps and outlines the plans producers have in place to develop their statistics;
  - iii. On 26 February, [we published a report](#) on statistics from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). This report provides an update on our view on the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) work to transform the LFS; and
  - iv. On 10 March I [wrote to ONS](#) following its assessment of its practice of releasing market-sensitive economic data outside of market trading hours at 0700, rather than the default release time for official statistics of 0930. I supported its plans to continue releasing these market sensitive statistics at the alternative time of 0700 instead of 0930 for the moment. When ONS is assured that its new website and Application Programming Interface are robust enough to manage the increased traffic that moving from 0700 could lead to, ONS should reconsider its approach, including whether there is an alternative option, which better meets the needs to users. I requested an update from ONS on its future review of an alternative release time for market sensitive economic statistics by 31 December 2025.
4. The recent Regulation Committee discussed our forthcoming review of ONS economic statistics. This highlights the current position, including strengths and limitations across the statistics portfolio, and makes three recommendations for strategic change. I have discussed our findings fully with the National Statistician, and aim to publish the report in early April.
5. We are continuing to work with a range of professions across government, including the Government Communications Service, to promote the principles of intelligent transparency and to provide training. The Government's recent response to the May 2024 Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) report on transforming the UK evidence base notes that "The Government Communication Service

(GCS) have incorporated the Intelligent Transparency guidance into the Data and Insight discipline section of our Modern Communications Operating Model... We refer to the Intelligent Transparency guidance in the latest update to our online Data and Insight for Communicators course. This training is available to all GCS communications professionals, as part of our GCS Advance Practitioner programme of learning and development.”

### **Casework**

6. Since the last Authority Board, we have received nine new cases, sitting on 209 for the year to date as of 14 March. This included one new parliamentary case covering claims made by the Minister of State for Police, Crime and Fire about the size of the police workforce. Topics covered by the other new cases include fuel poverty coherence across the UK, European Union-UK trade statistics, the collection of Sex data in the National Health Service and the Northern Ireland Census questions on Religion.
7. Following us [writing to the Scottish Government](#) in February to request the publication of additional information on the Health and Wellbeing Census, Scottish Government [wrote to us](#) on 3 March to confirm that the information had now been published. We also published our response [to Tony Dent](#) on measures of inflation and [to Mark Griffin MSP](#) regarding figures on Scottish Planning Approvals.

### **Engagement**

8. External events: In February I spoke at Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency’s Corporate Planning launch in Belfast, on a panel with the Permanent Secretary of the Northern Ireland Department of Finance, Neil Gibson, and the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil service, Jayne Brady.
9. In addition:
  - i. I recently spoke at an National Audit Office value for money showcase session;
  - ii. I spoke at a round table event at the House of Commons on the sustainability of the UK’s public finances;
  - iii. I participated in a seminar on trustworthy evidence organised by the UK’s Committee on Research Integrity; and
  - iv. I spoke to Chief Scientific Advisors at their breakfast meeting on how changes to the UK’s Code of Practice for Statistics can support the work of Chief Scientific Advisors and their teams.
10. OSR is also reigniting its seminars for government analysts this year. The aim of these seminars is to share insights from our regulatory work, promoting the Code and key areas of focus that support all types of analysis across government. We will start with a seminar on communicating uncertainty in April, where I am looking forward to speaking alongside David Spiegelhalter.
11. Issues on my mind:
  - i. ONS: as noted above, I am spending a lot of my time on the economic statistics review that we aim to publish at the beginning of April;
  - ii. developing OSR’s strategy and input into the Spending Review: This will provide an opportunity for building OSR’s capability, through training and development; and
  - iii. intelligent transparency: Following the success with the Government response to the PACAC report, we are focusing on reaching Ministerial offices.

**Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, OSR, 20 March 2025**

***Strategic Business Plan 2025/26 and the Spending Review***

**Purpose**

1. This paper provides the Authority Board (the Board) with an update and opportunity to comment on the ONS Strategic Business Plan (SBP) for 2025/26 and the second stage of the Spending Review (SR) process which will set budgets for 2026/27 to 2028/29.

**Timing**

2. Publication of the ONS SBP for 2025/26 is planned in April. Final submissions for the SR are due by 10 April, with outcomes expected in June.

**Recommendations**

3. Members of the Board are invited to:
  - i. note the progress made on HM Treasury's settlement conditions for UK Statistics Authority's 2025/26 budgets;
  - ii. comment on our planned response to HM Treasury's request for an options analysis on making response to surveys mandatory;
  - iii. comment on the ONS Strategic Business Plan 2025/26 prior to publication and accompanying stakeholder engagement plan; and
  - iv. note the developments on Spending Review bids.

**Background**

4. The first stage of the SR process confirmed UK Statistics Authority's 2025/26 budget would be at the same cash level as in 2024/25 but with additional flexibility on how we use it. The lowering of ringfences will lessen our historic over-reliance on programme funding for core statistical infrastructure but this did come with a fresh set of conditions.
5. The SR phase two process stipulates two scenarios for resource budgets. The first sees budgets held flat in cash terms (-5.7 per cent real) for the SR period. The second sees budgets reduced by two percent per year in cash terms (-11.2 per cent real). For capital the process is completely zero-based. (Our spending power is 95 per cent resource.)

**Discussion**

**2025/26**

6. Regular discussions with our Treasury Spending Team have ensured that progress is in line with their requirements and all returns have been well received. One condition was to develop an options analysis on making response to surveys mandatory. Is the Board minded to add a recommendation to this?
7. With budgets confirmed for 2025/26 and milestones in place (pending baselining), business planning is close to completion. Details of budgetary allocations were presented to the Board in January, and key milestones for 2025/26 are included in the Strategic Business Plan. The format and content of the plan remain in line with previous annual iterations approved by the Board. The Board are asked to consider this near-final version ahead of publication pending Portfolio and Investment Committee (PIC) and Executive Committee (ExCo) comments and while noting that milestones within section 2.5 marked 'in progress' will be updated prior to publication as several of these are expected to complete by the end of March.
8. The Strategic Business Plan reflects the outcome of careful consideration of priorities for 2025/26, previously discussed at the Board, paying particular attention to the settlement conditions imposed by HM Treasury. ONS will continue to focus on producing quality, impactful statistics that support the UK Statistics Authority's strategic aim of delivering



statistics for the public good. (The plan notes that a new UK Statistics Authority five-year strategy will be published in 2025 once agreed by the Board.)

9. Based on feedback from the Board in February 2025, this latest version includes further detail on the challenges posed by the financial context and the need for careful prioritisation. This includes recognition that some activities will have to be slowed, paused or stopped due to affordability in a second year of real terms budget cuts.
10. Communications colleagues have developed a stakeholder engagement plan to ensure we have considered user need in our decisions and that any impact is communicated early. This includes explaining our prioritisation criteria in the context of constrained finances, and consulting with stakeholders on any significant change to outputs, in line with the Code.

### Spending Review

11. Ahead of the interim response deadline of 27 February, ONS returned all mandated Spending Review templates and artefacts to HM Treasury, under cover of a letter from Sir Ian Diamond. This return included UK Statistics Authority's response to the Zero-Based Review (ZBR), signed off by Professor Sir Ian Diamond and Dr Jacob Abboud, plus an updated efficiency and savings plan (ESP).
12. Revised business cases for the Future of Population and Migration Statistics (FPMS) and Integrated Data Services programmes were submitted in early March. This was to coincide with internal governance and planned dates for scrutiny at respective Treasury Approval Panels.
13. Having met the requirements of completing the ZBR, ESP, and illustrating what the two standard financial scenarios (see paragraph 5) would involve, HM Treasury is now willing to engage in a discussion about bids for additional resource. This has been approached from a system-wide perspective, with additive options presented as follows:
  - i. "option 3" - Embedding improvements to our social and business surveys and enhancing the outcomes of our surveys through continued integration of administrative data;
  - ii. "option 4" - Delivering continuous improvements to our core statistics and cyber-security enhancements, integrating relevant advances in technology and innovation; and
  - iii. "option 5" - Focused activity to mitigate the most significant inherent risks to the quality of our core statistics, across the end-to-end statistical system.
14. The cost range for these options are still being refined, including through close engagement with HM Treasury colleagues.

### **Next Steps**

15. Feedback from PIC, ExCo and the Board will be addressed and incorporated into the final Strategic Business Plan ahead of publication on the ONS website in April.
16. Final submissions into Spending Review 2025 will be made by 10 April.

**Tom Taylor, Finance Planning and Performance, ONS, 20 March 2025**

***Way Forward - Transformed Labour Force Survey***

**Purpose**

1. This paper seeks UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) approval for the way forward on the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) project and Labour Force Survey (LFS).

**Recommendations**

2. Members of the board are invited to:
  - i. approve the recommendation to implement TLFS improvements and then transition to using TLFS for labour market statistics (Option C);
  - ii. comment on the Option C delivery approach and residual risks/uncertainties; and
  - iii. comment on the proposed communications and engagement approach.

**Background**

3. Since July 2024, the TLFS project has focused on testing and refining the TLFS design, mitigating key delivery risks and in parallel, continuing to improve the quality of the existing LFS survey. This paper summarises key characteristics of the improved TLFS design.
4. To support robust and transparent decision making on the future of the TLFS project a formal investment appraisal has been conducted. In brief, a long-list of options representing potential futures on the project has been initially down-selected to a short-list, before being assessed against the ability to meet user data quality requirements, feasibility/risk of delivery, long-term viability, time, cost (10 years of costs at Net Present Value), affordability and value for money.
5. As set out in section 30 of the Statistics and Regulation Services Act 2007, the National Statistician is the UK Statistics Authority Board's advisor on statistical issues. This paper presents the National Statistician's recommendation to the Board based on recent Executive Committee consideration of the options, evidence and data on the project.

**Discussion**

***Development of the TLFS Improved Design***

6. In-line with the data-led scientific approach agreed with the board in July 2024, the refinement of the TLFS design has been informed by the short-core tests ('LMX tests') combined with extensive user engagement and technical assurance. The key characteristics of the improved TLFS design are:
  - i. a shorter, core Labour Market (LM) focused survey (aligned to the LMX tests) – to reduce partial individual and household response, to increase response at wave 1, and reduce attrition over waves;
  - ii. separate LM 'Core' and non-LM 'Plus' surveys – with a larger proportion of Core sample being followed up in later waves helping flows data and measures of change;
  - iii. targeted face-to-face – to reduce non-response bias and improve inclusivity in the highest priority areas, improving representativeness;
  - iv. data rotation – Reduces respondent burden by condensing the length of the wave 2-5 questionnaire, reducing attrition and bias and improving consistency across waves; and
  - v. complex data capture – collect higher quality Standard Industrial Classification/Standard Occupational Classification data, improving current issues of high proportion of uncodeable or missing responses.

7. As well as delivering the data quality improvements outlined above, the new design will reduce respondent burden, be operationally sustainable, follow international best practice and ensure that the collection of labour market statistics using a survey approach is put on a sustainable footing.
8. However, there are trade-offs to the design, with the smaller individual sample sizes for the Core and Plus survey and less information collected from the same individual, reducing the granularity of analysis possible. Also, while the design will improve Labour Market data quality, as with all surveys, some missingness and bias will remain which will need to be addressed methodologically.
9. The technical design proposals benefited from external review from the Labour Market Technical Group, the Stakeholder Advisory Panel on Labour Market Statistics and our academic advisors – all were broadly supportive of the conclusions drawn there including those relating to the improved future design of TLFS.

### Investment Appraisal and Recommendation

10. The Investment Appraisal assesses the following long list of options:
  - i. Option 0: Do Nothing LFS;
  - ii. Option A: Do Minimum Improve LFS;
  - iii. Option B: TLFS Pause and Restart;
  - iv. Option C: TLFS Implement Improvements then Transition;
  - v. Option D: TLFS Use As-Is Improve Later; and
  - vi. Option E: TLFS Use Now and Keep LFS While Improve.
11. Options 0 and A both stop the TLFS project and test the ability of the LFS to meet the labour market requirement into the future. Option 0 maintains financial year (FY) 24/25 investment levels while Option A increases investment and interviewer resources to improve LFS data quality. While Option A provides a short-term quality boost, these two lowest cost options both present key risks achieving sufficient, representative response sustainably to enable the production of robust statistics and analysis on the labour market. These options demonstrate the fundamental challenges of sustaining a legacy survey almost entirely reliant on face-to-face in-home interviewing into the future. Neither option is seen as a viable long-term solution by external academics or key users.
12. Options B, C, D and E all implement the improved future TLFS design in differing ways. Option B was discounted early as pausing the parallel run while improvements to the TLFS were implemented disrupted data continuity and introduced high levels of operational risk off-boarding and re-employing hundreds of interviewing staff for no financial gain. Option D tested the ability to transition to the 'as is' TLFS as soon as feasible, stop the LFS and then improve the TLFS while it is being used to produce labour market statistics. This option offered some cost savings, but with a significant initial impact on data quality and stability which key users and stakeholders have indicated they would not support. Option E attempted to mitigate the data quality risks of an early 'as is' TLFS transition by keeping the LFS running, but overall this only resulted in the highest cost, lowest value-for-money, option with added risks associated with developing the complex methods required to combine two differing live labour market surveys.
13. Option C implements the improved TLFS design at the earliest operationally feasible point, relying on an improved LFS (as Option A) for labour market data until the TLFS is assured. This option prioritises the implementation of the improved TLFS design, which as discussed above is endorsed by external academics, the Stakeholder Advisory Panel and the Labour Market Technical Group. As such, it provides the highest confidence in achieving a majority of the labour market requirements of the options considered and offers sustainability into the future given the reduced respondent burden of the short core, online-first mode, adaptive survey design and larger sample. This option's

transition approach is also favoured by high level officials at HM Treasury, the Bank of England and Office for Budget Responsibility, who all endorsed Option C as the preferred way forward in a high-level meeting with Sir Ian on 21st March 2025, although it should be noted that their opinions vary on acceptable trade-offs which impact on the optimal timing of transition within this option. Our ambition with option C is transition onto TLFS within 2026, but with a data-led approach that may mean later timeframes if the stability of the parallel run is disrupted by design changes and users are not prepared to accept the subsequent trade-offs required to hold to 2026 delivery – the next section discusses the delivery of Option C in more depth.

14. In summary, data quality, sustainability, value for money analysis, stakeholder support and external assurance all support Option C as the preferred option and on this basis, the National Statistician recommends this option to the Board for approval.

### Delivering Option C

15. In delivering Option C, the project is prioritising delivering at pace (given the high cost of the parallel run and the imperative to improve the quality of labour market statistics) while learning the [lessons from the past on TLFS](#), which indicate the importance of taking a data-led approach, managing remaining uncertainty on the project effectively and avoiding over-committing to fixed delivery timelines. The recent investment appraisal considered two key areas of residual and unavoidable uncertainty in implementing TLFS improvements (relevant to Options B, C, D and E):

- i. *Impact of Survey Change* - While the project can make an informed prediction of the impact of any survey improvements on the data, how the survey actually performs, what the actual new data shows and how the narrative around TLFS coherence with other data sources holds following survey change may be different. The key impacts include the stability of the data set across quarters, whether the pre-developed methods remain viable and whether the design changes deliver the full benefits anticipated. It is not until the real data are assessed can the need for any further quarters of data and any survey or methods refinements be fully determined; and
- ii. *Novel Complex Variable Approaches* – Improvements to the data capture of complex variables, specifically industrial and occupational classifications, directly support quality improvements to the TLFS. The ‘Survey Assist’ AI proof-of-concept recently reported to the board is promising and at the leading edge of modern survey design, but understandably translating a concept into operational reality contains a level of technical risk which the project is managing. Recognising the risks associated with AI use, the project is also exploring alternative improvements (see below).

16. Within the context above and in-line with the recent paper to the Executive, a data-led approach to achieving pace and managing uncertainty will therefore be:

- i. a clear leadership ambition to deliver in 2026, with a well-defined phase of TLFS development to July 2026 that puts the project in the best possible position to enable the earliest transition;
- ii. continued robust mitigation of risks (including affordability);
- iii. testing of the plan to identify stretch opportunities and increase stability/assurance;
- iv. continued engagement with stakeholders to rationalise/prioritise datasets and achieve alignment around the trade-offs associated with earlier delivery;
- v. regular confidence checkpoints and risk update reporting;
- vi. a Strategic Decision Point in July 2026, enabling a decision to progress to either a first TLFS labour market publication around November 2026 or further quarters of data collection, quality assurance and periodic assessments; and
- vii. communicating with confidence the work on the TLFS project, the ambition of 2026 and the data-led approach that will inform final decisions.

17. The timeline captures the assumptions relating to earlier, or later, TLFS transition points, with driving factors being whether design changes deliver the full benefits, whether data remains stable across quarters and whether pre-developed methods remain viable. Uncertainty will be removed through learning over time and as more data becomes available, but latent risks may still emerge.
18. In delivering to the July 2026 strategic decision point, the project will mitigate the following key risks:
- ii. Data Quality – Inherent uncertainty remains in the ability to meet labour market quality requirements until the new data is analysed. The testing and robust assurance of the updated TLFS design and early trade-off discussions with stakeholders supports effective mitigation;
  - iii. Complex Variables - Innovative approaches utilising artificial intelligence show great promise, but timeliness to delivery and technical challenges remain and are subject to collective organisational focus. More ‘tried and trusted’ options are being explored in parallel with a 3-pronged strategy to resolving the issue;
  - iv. UK Data Coherence – Methods and approaches to integrate data from Northern Ireland should they transition to a transformed LFS survey ahead of ONS have been appraised, but key challenges remain due to different collection and processing requirements which could directly impact the ability of ONS to hold to existing UK Labour Market publication schedules/outputs;
  - v. Reputation – While key stakeholders support Option C, the costs and range of timescales will prompt a level of further media attention. Mitigations include publishing research from the TLFS, similar to what is in the technical report, to demonstrate progress on the project; and
  - vii. Non-Labour Market development – Development of the non-LM ‘Plus’ survey will follow the LM development meaning quality improvements to non-LM data will come later. A decision is needed on whether non-LM data outputs continue to come from the LFS, come from TLFS Plus with quality limitations or are paused once the LM data transitions to TLFS Core. Mitigations include fast tracking work to understand current TLFS non-LM data quality and engagement with non-LM data users to inform next steps.

### Communications and External Engagement

19. The intention is to publish a labour market statistics update on our website on 8 April that covers our progress on TLFS design and our ambition to transition in 2026, including technical elements captured in a research article and a link to the academic expert view. There is the opportunity for it to be accompanied by a wider Survey Recovery Plan which is being developed in parallel and which details more broadly our pathway to a robust, sustainable survey system that can deliver the critical data required.
20. These publications will be supported by proactive media and stakeholder engagement focusing on the progress ONS is making addressing the challenges with labour market statistics. This is likely to include advanced background briefing for selected media on the intricacies of the TLFS design and the innovative efforts to boost survey responses. On the day of publication our current plans include a supporting press release plus a blog by the National Statistician explaining our approach and achievements to date, along with a briefing round of key economics commentators including the Financial Times, Bloomberg and the Times. In addition to updating our key users, we will email our economic statistics stakeholders inviting them to hear more detail at a webinar.

### **Conclusion**

21. The updated TLFS design will significantly improve the quality of labour market data over that collected from the current LFS and the existing ‘as is’ TLFS survey. Option C implements the improved TLFS design at the earliest operationally feasible point, relying on an improved LFS for labour market data until the TLFS is assured. Data quality,

sustainability and value-for-money assessments all support Option C as the recommended option and this option is the clear preference of users and senior stakeholders. Our ambition with option C is transition onto TLFS within 2026, but with a data-led approach that enables later timeframes if key users don't support the trade-offs that may be required. The intention is to publish a labour market statistics update on our website on 8 April that covers our progress on TLFS design and our ambition to transition in 2026.

**Alex Lambert, Director of Social Surveys, Liz McKeown, Director of Economic Statistics Production and Analysis, Office for National Statistics, 25 March 2025**

***Recommendation on the Future of Population and Migration Statistics***

**As this area of work is policy in development, this paper will be published upon completion.**

***Strategic Risk profile Update***

**Purpose**

1. This paper provides the Authority Board (the Board) with an updated Strategic Risk profile following strategic risk workshops and discussions at the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) on 13 March 2025.

**Recommendations**

2. Members of the Board are invited to:
  - i. review the updated Strategic Risk profile and risk appetite levels;
  - ii. review analysis of the wider Strategic Risk profile, with particular focus on Strategic Risk (SR)3 which is outside of risk appetite; and
  - iii. review the analysis of the strategic risk owned by the National Statistician, overseen by the Authority Board – ‘Independence, Trustworthiness and Impact’.

**Background**

3. The strategic risk profile demonstrates the most significant risks to the successful delivery of the UK Statistics Authority Strategy and its strategic objectives, owned by the UK Statistics Authority senior leadership. This was discussed at Executive Committee (ExCo) followed by the March ARAC.

**Discussion**

**Strategic Risk Profile Update and Risk Appetites**

4. Whilst a major transformation is not proposed, there are some key changes, particularly to the quality risks:
  - i. SR0 ‘Independence, trustworthiness and impact’ – an increase in risk appetite has been proposed to reflect the changing external environment and implications of budgetary restrictions meaning we should have a greater appetite for risk taking to ensure our impact can continue to be felt, whilst remaining on the minimal end of the risk appetite scale;
  - ii. SR1 ‘User needs’ – this has been repurposed around meeting user needs of our key (5-6) users to ensure we have a clear bar in terms of measuring this strategic risk as we cannot meet all user needs with our current funding allocation; and
  - iii. quality risks – the existing risk profile includes SR3 ‘Quality Statistics’. The refresh proposes the following which should enable a more nuanced assessment of our quality risks, whilst ensuring we can focus on mitigating the most high-risk areas (our outputs linked to Priority Outcome 2):
    - a new economic statistics risk (SR7 ‘Quality economic statistics’) covering the end-to-end quality of our key economic statistics;
    - the refresh of SR9 from the focus on FPMS and our ability to transform to a risk around the end-to-end production of quality population statistics;
    - the new SR3 focuses on the quality management framework and its application to support the management of quality risks/improvements; and
    - SR5 ‘Our People’, SR6 ‘Our Communications’, SR11 ‘Data access and usability’ and SR12 ‘Technological Resilience’ have small amendments to include quality in the risk descriptions, as these are areas which could impact quality.
5. SR8 ‘Inclusivity in our statistics and analysis’ – we recommend the closure of this risk once the Inclusive Data Taskforce (IDTF) commitments are delivered (March 2025). As



inclusivity in our statistics remains a key requirement, this will be merged into our quality risks to ensure our statistics remain inclusive.

6. The updated Strategic Risk Profile includes the risk descriptions, appetite ranges and statements for each risk.
7. The strategic risk profile continues to be assured by ExCo and its sub-committees at the executive level, plus ARAC at the non-executive level, with the UK Statistics Authority Board receiving an analysis of the entire profile on a bi-annual basis.

#### Independence and Trustworthiness Risk

7. The controls in place for SR0 'Independence, Trustworthiness and Impact' remain effective. They have allowed for accountability of activities and delivery including parliamentary engagement through meeting new Ministers following the election, the Office for Statistics Regulation's execution of its regulatory role, and undertaking coherent communications activities in response to increased media scrutiny.
8. In addition, the National Statistician spoke at Treasury Select Committee. This session allowed the Office for National Statistics to communicate what we're doing to ensure delivery against our priorities, assuring key stakeholders of progress on our core functions.
9. In January, the inaugural Statistics Assembly (the central recommendation of the Lievesley review) was held successfully in providing increased user engagement. An independent report has been published detailing observations and recommendations. The UK Statistics Authority is due to publish a detailed response to the recommendations and a corresponding action plan.

#### Wider Strategic Risk Profile

10. The Authority has largely been operating within the UK Statistics Authority Board agreed risk appetite ranges. However, SR3 'Quality statistics' continues to operate outside of appetite and SR12 'Technological resilience' is under discussion.
11. SR3 'Quality statistics': Whilst there has been some progress over the last 15 months, this risk continues to operate out of risk appetite.. This risk was discussed in depth at the February ExCo which noted a strong culture and commitment to quality, and a robust quality framework in place to understand and identify quality concerns and avoid the organisation publishing statistics that were not of acceptable quality. Evidence for this can be seen in the reduction in major errors over the last year.
12. ExCo noted that many of the reported quality risks relate to other strategic risk areas including legacy (SR12), data sources (SR11 for admin data with no associated strategic risk for surveys) and resourcing/capability (SR5) and will be reconvening for a further discussion around the manifestation of these risks across the refreshed risk profile.
13. Addressing legacy is vital in supporting the management of several of the strategic risks. We must ensure our systems continue to be supported, maintained and secure and that the costs of continuing to fund legacy systems are affordable particularly where specialist skills for their management are scarce. A deep dive of SR12 is scheduled by Portfolio and Investment Committee in March and ARAC in May.
15. Business planning processes have been strengthened further this year. We await sight of what activity will stop, reduce or pause and the related risks and impacts of this as well as ensuring that the outcomes of business planning have been clearly communicated and accepted and sufficiently address quality risks and legacy reduction. A continued 'flat cash' settlement beyond the current financial year will present further challenges and we are nearly at an affordable headcount. Business planning has directed significant additional budget towards the survey directorates and maintained

Economic, Social and Environmental Statistics Group budgets in nominal terms, which provides assurance over effective prioritisation. Whilst the organisation is closer to the margin of where further budget cuts would impact its strategic priorities, our budget for 2025/26 is known and fixed and we are applying to HM Treasury for additional resources for the future, the outcomes of which will help inform our strategic risk assessment.

### **Conclusion**

16. This paper has highlighted some challenges that the Board should be aware of in relation to SR3 and SR12. It has also touched on the importance of business planning and prioritisation to ensure we can deliver our priorities without compromising on quality, including addressing our legacy estate. Our Spending Review 2025 return will seek to ensure we put ourselves in the best position to ensure delivery of our priorities whilst managing our most significant risks. The refreshed strategic risk profile seeks to ensure we have a clear view of these risks and how they are being managed and we invite the views of the Board on the refreshed strategic risk profile and risk appetite.

**Natalie Tarr, Head Assurance and Kirsty Campion, Head of Risk, ONS, 18 March 2025**