

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Draft Minutes
Thursday 26 March 2020
Via Videoconference

Present

UK Statistics Authority

Sir David Norgrove (Chair)
Ms Sian Jones (Deputy Chair)
Mr Jonathan Athrow
Ms Helen Boaden
Professor Sir Ian Diamond
Professor David Hand
Professor Jonathan Haskel
Mr Ed Humpherson
Professor Anne Trefethen

Also in attendance

Mr Nick Bateson
Mr Iain Bell
Mr Owen Brace
Mr Robert Bumpstead
Mr Douglas Cameron (Secretariat)
Ms Sally-Ann Jones (Secretariat)
Ms Frankie Kay
Ms Liz McKeown (for item 11)
Ms Nicola Tyson-Payne (for item 10)
Ms Amy Williams (Secretariat)

Apologies

Ms Nora Nanayakkara
Professor Sir Adrian Smith

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Professor Sir Adrian Smith and Ms Nora Nanayakkara.

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 2020, were agreed.

4. Report from the Authority Chair

- 4.1 The Chair noted gratitude on behalf of the Board to Sir Adrian for his significant contributions as a member of the Board over two terms. Sir Adrian had attended the first meeting of the Board in February 2008. He left to become the Director General for Knowledge and Innovation and Skills at the Department for Business Innovation and Skills before returning to the Authority Board in 2012. Sir Adrian spent much of this time as Deputy Chair of the Board; and at different times as chair of the Committee for Official Statistics, the ONS Board and the Regulation Committee. In 2014 Sir Adrian also undertook a review of the governance of prices statistics for the Authority.
- 4.2 The Chair reported on his recent activity since the Board last met, noting he had written to Mr John Healey MP regarding rough sleeping statistics. He had also written to Mr Lewis Macdonald MSP on Transport Scotland's use of unpublished analysis on traffic.
- 4.3 The consultation on the reform to Retail Prices Index (RPI) methodology had been launched on 11 March. The meeting heard that a cross-government decision on handling of consultations in the current circumstances was expected but had not yet been received.

5. Report from the Director General for Regulation [SA(20)18]

- 5.1 Mr Humpherson provided an update on regulation activity since the last meeting. The OSR team had effectively transitioned to homeworking and support was in place for team members regarding their wellbeing.
- 5.2 Mr Humpherson informed the meeting that the publication of the report of the review of HMRC's Statistical Quality Management would be delayed to the end of April (as agreed with HMRC). The National Statistics Assessment on ONS Employment and Job Statistics was a significant output given the current situation, with plans in place for publication of the assessment report. The report focussed on how to adapt labour market statistics to a changing economic context and highlighted good practice by ONS in this area.
- 5.3 The meeting heard that OSR were developing responses to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on statistical regulation. This included granting an exemption from the Code of Practice for Statistics for ONS to publish market sensitive statistics at 07:00 rather than at 09:30. The prioritisation of OSR's work programme was also being considered.
- 5.4 Mr Humpherson noted that OSR would take a proportionate regulatory approach to the work by ONS on behavioural and lifestyle insights when published.
- 5.5 The Board noted that ONS and OSR's responses in the current situation had provided an opportunity for statistical change with both responding to the challenges in producing and regulating statistics in an agile manner.

6. Report from the Chief Executive [SA(20)19]

- 6.1 Professor Sir Ian Diamond provided the Board with a comprehensive update on the Authority's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Three teams were in place: a core group comprising of the National Statistician, Deputy National Statisticians and Chief

of Staff with overall oversight; another looking at the implications on ONS operations including HR and IT issues; and a third looking at the impact for existing and new statistical outputs.

- 6.2 The meeting heard that the transition to homeworking across the office had been made with minimal upheaval. The approach was underpinned by IT with improvements and increased capacity to the network and laptops for all office-based staff. The wellbeing of staff was and would continue to be a key area of focus to maintain and support a new way of working. HR had produced guidance for line managers regarding caring responsibilities following school closures.
- 6.3 The impact of COVID-19 on existing statistical outputs had been considered, particularly those that had relied on face to face collection, for example prices and labour market statistics. An online platform had been set up for the Labour Force Survey and telephone interviews expanded. The International Passenger Survey, which related to travel, tourism, and migration statistics, had been paused. The meeting heard that other modes of collection and data sources were being considered including web scraping, administrative and business data. As noted earlier in the meeting, the challenges presented an opportunity for statistical change.
- 6.4 The Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme was scheduled for discussion later in the meeting. It was noted that the work continued at pace in preparation for the 2021 Census – including an assessment of potential risks to delivery given the current situation.
- 6.5 ONS had produced a number of new statistical outputs to inform decision making across government and to inform the public. A dedicated new area had been added to the ONS website with the latest statistical information on COVID-19. A new Opinions and Lifestyle Survey had been launched with the first wave of results informing the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies meeting attended by Sir Ian. A new business survey had been launched to assess the Business Impact of COVID-19, with results scheduled for publication on 2 April. A joint piece of work was underway with the Department of Health and Social Care to estimate excess deaths due to COVID-19.
- 6.6 Moving on to other topics, Sir Ian had attended the United Nations Statistical Commission conference at the beginning of March, which included the signing of new Memoranda of Understanding with National Statistics Institutes in Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda.
- 6.7 The budget on 11 March included £5 million funding for the Integrated Data Platform and £1.8 million for a Data Quality Centre for Excellence.
- 6.8 The Board commended the work by ONS noting that the new statistical outputs were reflective of the heterogeneity of people's experiences in the current circumstances.
- 6.9 The Board also noted their thanks to Mr Jonathan Athrow, Ms Frankie Kay, Ms Sarah Henry and the wider team for all of their work following the successful data acquisition from HMRC.

7. Strategy update [SA(20)20]

- 7.1 Mr Cameron introduced a paper which provided an update on progress towards the development of the next Authority strategy; the plans for continued development; and a recommendation to pause its prospective launch to an appropriate time later in the summer. As discussed throughout the meeting, the response to COVID-19 across the UK Statistical System provided an opportunity for statistical change which would need to be reflected in the strategy.

7.2 The Board welcomed the progress made in the development of the strategy and agreed the proposal to pause the launch. The Board would continue to be updated on the development of the strategy.

8. ONS Business Plan [SA(20)21]

8.1 Mr Bateson introduced a paper which set out the current draft of the ONS Strategic Business Plan and sought the Board's views on the content and structure of the plan before developing a final draft, which would be submitted to the April Authority Board.

8.2 The current draft set out an initial set of strategic objectives which aligned to the principals of the developing Authority Strategy (radical, ambitious, sustainable and inclusive). It was noted that the next iteration would provide further detail regarding success measures. The steering group referenced in the draft plan would be an advisory group to the National Statistician.

8.3 The Board commended the progress made on the draft ONS Strategic Delivery Plan and looked forward to receiving a final plan at the next meeting.

9. Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme update [SA(20)22]

9.1 Mr Bell and Ms Tyson-Payne introduced a paper which provided an update on the programme, focussing on the Census, its legislative progress and statistical design including for under-enumeration. The paper also described progress on the wider transformation programme including the responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

9.2 The Board heard that the legislative timetable was tight but achievable, with the Draft Census Order being laid in Parliament on 2 March. The lessons from the rehearsal had been incorporated into the programme. The Census statistical design included the under-enumeration strategy. It was noted that administrative data (HMRC, DWP and Council Tax data), would be used at all stages of Census which would ensure any under enumeration could be monitored and engagement strategies developed.

9.3 As part of the response to COVID-19 the level of engagement with suppliers had increased. Currently there were no major implications to the supply chain. Work was ongoing with the Devolved Administrations regarding scenario planning in the event of a continued lockdown, with close monitoring of Census operations and planning in other countries, including the United States. With regard to business and social survey transformation as noted earlier in the meeting the response to COVID-19 had accelerated some of the work including the new online business survey to assess the business impact of COVID-19.

10. Any other business

10.1 The Authority Board would meet next on Thursday 30 April 2020 at 10:30 by teleconference.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Agenda

26 March 2020, 09:15 to 11:00, Boardroom, London (via teleconference)

Chair: Sir David Norgrove

Apologies: Prof. Jonathan Haskel, Nora Nanayakkara

Attendees: Mr Douglas Cameron (for item 5), Ms Nicola Tyson-Payne (for item 7)

1 09:15-09:20 5 mins	Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Declarations of interest	Meeting of 27 Feb 2020
2 09:20-09:30 10 mins	Report from the Authority Chair	Oral report Sir David Norgrove
3 09:30-09:35 5 mins	Report from the Director-General for Regulation	SA(20)18 Mr Ed Humpherson
4 09:35-10:20 45 mins	Report from the Chief Executive	SA(20)19 Prof. Sir Ian Diamond
5 10:20-10:25 5 mins	Strategy update	SA(20)20 Mr Douglas Cameron
6 10:25-10:30 5 mins	ONS Business Plan	SA(20)21 Mr Nick Bateson
7 10:30-10:55 25 mins	Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme update	SA(20)22 Mr Iain Bell Ms Nicola Tyson-Payne
8 10:55-11:00 5 mins	Any other business	

Next meeting: 30 April, London, 09:15 to 11.00

Update from the Director General for Regulation

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on regulation activity since the last Board meeting.

Discussion

2. Key activities since the last Board meeting include:

- i. **Coronavirus - operational:** we have moved to an entirely homeworking model and we have been able to manage the impact effectively, with Skype and remote connectivity working well. We hope to continue to produce regulatory assessments, compliance checks and casework at more or less the same rate as before, albeit with a more toned-down communication approach (e.g. straightforward Tweets without animation). This business-as-usual approach may however become increasingly difficult as staff adapt their working patterns to accommodate more childcare, and as engagement with producers gets harder.
- ii. **Coronavirus – regulatory:** we are developing regulatory responses to the impact of coronavirus on statistical production. These include:

- **Rapid designation as National Statistics or other confirmation of quality**– for any outputs that are produced in response to the crisis, for example NHS England statistics on the impact on hospital capacity. Designation or rapid OSR review would allow producers to signal the importance of these responsive outputs to users and show the agility of the statistical system. We would propose a very light touch process of review and discussion.
- **Exemptions** – where the pandemic means that producers cannot comply with the Code, we would grant exemptions (e.g. from publishing at 930).
- **Temporary de-designations:** if the impact on a producer is such that they cannot produce statistics to the same quality (e.g. because a full survey is not possible), we would grant a temporary suspension of the National Statistics designation on request. We've been encouraging producers to consider this because it allows them to signal quickly to users that the characteristics of the statistics have changed.

I have been impressed by the agility and pragmatism of both ONS and other producers in response to coronavirus.

- iii. **Labour market assessment:** We plan to publish our assessment of the labour market statistics produced by ONS on 26 March. The theme is how to adapt labour market statistics to a changing economic context – using new sources and tracking new issues in the labour market (quality of work as opposed to quantity, for example) – and being clearer on the uncertainty in the published estimates of unemployment. This would be a significant output at any time, but the coronavirus lends an urgency to these themes: because the labour market itself is undergoing extremely rapid change, and because the way ONS collect the data is going to undergo very rapid change. We draw out this theme of adapting the statistics to a changing environment in both the report and accompanying press statement and blog.
- iv. **HMRC review:** Our other major output for March is our review of HMRC's quality assurance processes (following major errors). The report is in near-final form, but we have not finalised the logistics of publishing with HMRC – in particular, is this a good time to publish the report? The main improvement area is that HMRC statisticians need to have a better understanding of how the operational data they use is collected and what it means. This theme – understanding administrative data – could equally apply to other large producers, and we will be looking to find ways of pulling these lessons out for wider dissemination.

- v. **Audit Committee report:** I submitted a paper to the Audit Committee in March. As well as providing the opportunity to scrutinise the work of OSR, it gave a summary of the main themes of our work looking at the ONS and wider statistical production landscape. We found strengths, including greater evidence of cross-GSS collaboration (e.g. housing); and areas to work on across the system, most notably clarity of communication. Apart from the obvious short-term challenges, I am working with my leadership team to review and continually develop our internal processes. We are currently looking specifically at our processes of report production, with a view to introducing greater structure to our scope and to the structure of our reports earlier in our production process.

Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, 18 March 2020

List of Annexes

Annex A Regulatory Activities Dashboard

Regulatory Activities March 2020

Economy	Business, Trade and International Development	Health and Social Care	Children, Education and skills	Crime and Security
<p>Regulation: Evaluation of ONS's approach to changes to RPI published as part of letter from Sir David Norgrove on 3 February to RPI/CPI User Group following correspondence to Ed Humpherson and Sir David. Followed up with ONS and were re-assured by the response. Meeting with RSS welcomed suggestions in annex as helpful.</p> <p>Compliance Checks: CPIH</p> <p>Following up on significant errors: Met with ONS's Public Sector Finances team on significant error in the PSF statistics. Were reassured by positive steps being taken to prevent further errors.</p> <p>Casework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Investigating complaint about ONS's presentation of productivity puzzle. - Met with the Scottish Government Chief Statistician about the Scottish Government's proposal to issue 'an alternative' to its annual Expenditure & Revenue Statistics that it intended to publish, the same day as its National Statistics. Continue to have concerns, will monitor these proposals. <p>Blog: Publishing ONS's engagement with Cambridge Ahead about differences in employment growth figures for Greater Cambridge region. The blog focuses on the benefits of curiosity. In enhancing the value and quality of national statistics</p>	<p>Compliance Checks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Retail Sales: Ongoing investigation into the circumstances behind the delay to the use of VAT data in RSI continues. <p>Assessment: Business Demography: Continuing to gather evidence from users.</p> <p>UK Trade – Preparing a position statement on the status of the assessment of UK Trade statistics.</p> <p>Casework: Discussing with DiT its use & presentation of most recent Trade figures, which included the influence of "Gold" trading. Including these figures, converts the UK's long term "goods" deficit into a surplus.</p>	<p>Compliance checks: Checks of Mental Health Act statistics and Recorded Dementia Diagnoses statistics published.</p> <p>Assessments: Planning & research for new assessment of Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) with NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA).</p> <p>Mental Health Systemic Review: Analysis of evidence is underway and report for England statistics is planned for May 2020.</p> <p>Social Care - Systemic Review: Scotland report published in February, and GB report planned for March. Ongoing engagement activity including following up on recommendations is planned for new financial year.</p> <p>Life Expectancy: Exploratory work ongoing to understand & identify gaps in understanding across the UK.</p>	<p>Compliance Checks: Aiming to publish letter on DfE school funding statistics before end of March.</p> <p>Casework: Response to Welsh Education Minister published, however correspondence continues regarding NASWUT and the per pupil funding figures used. Higher Education Initial Participation Rate letter to DfE published. Investigating complaint around the count of Children's Centres through the Get Information on Schools database.</p> <p>Responding to query around the accuracy of the proportion of first choice applicants who have not passed the 11-plus and entrance to grammar schools.</p> <p>Skills - Systemic Review: Finalising report for publication, this will include sharing with producers who provided comments on the advance draft.</p>	<p>Compliance Checks: We intend to start a compliance check of MoJ proven reoffending and criminal justice quarterly statistics in March, to report in April. Reoffending is a topic of considerable public interest at the moment.</p> <p>Police Recorded Crime statistics: Discussions with ONS about the most effective regulatory input OSR can have on PRC are ongoing.</p> <p>Raising awareness of OSR: We are doing two presentations to MOD analysts about OSR – to spread knowledge about what we do and how we do it, including how we will work with them.</p> <p>Assessment: We have confirmed the designation of NI Motoring Offence Statistics as National Statistics. We expect to confirm continued NS status for statistics from the NI Safe Community Survey, produced by the NI Department of Justice in March/April.</p>
Population and Society	Labour Market and Welfare	Agriculture, Energy and Environment	Housing, Planning and Local Services	Travel, Transport and Tourism
<p>Compliance Checks: Published letter on Sub National Population projections (ONS, NRS, Welsh Government and NISRA).</p> <p>Assessment: Check in meetings with census offices held to update on progress against preliminary findings of phase 1 assessment.</p> <p>Loneliness – Systemic Review: Stakeholder engagement commenced in February.</p> <p>Sex and Gender Data: Update meetings held with census offices and ONS harmonisation team. Attended Scottish Government stakeholder events for Sex and Gender in data Working Group in Glasgow and Edinburgh in February.</p>	<p>Compliance Checks: Aiming to publish letter covering WG, SG and NISRA labour market statistics alongside ONS LM assessment report.</p> <p>Assessment: Aiming to publish ONS Labour Market assessment report by the end of March.</p>	<p>Compliance Checks: Compliance check of Forest Research's Timber Price Indices and Scottish Government's Rural Scotland Key Facts statistics due to be completed at the end of March.</p> <p>Defra user engagement - Systemic Review. The draft report will be shared with the April Regulation Committee.</p>	<p>Compliance Checks: Initiating compliance checks on MHCLG and WG rough sleeping estimates</p> <p>Assessments: Preparing report on Northern Ireland Planning Statistics assessment (publish April 20)</p> <p>Casework: Published response to John Healey letter on rough sleeping</p> <p>Housing - Systemic Review: Two-year update report published 27 February following publication of cross-GSS updated workplan and review formally closed.</p>	<p>Compliance Checks: Compliance check finding letters for road safety statistics produced in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were published at the start of March, along with a suite of comms including a blog and tweets.</p> <p>Assessment: Report for Transport Focus' National Rail Passenger Survey was published in early January. Transport Focus published an action plan for addressing the requirements at the start of February.</p>

*Chief Executive's Report, March 2020***Purpose**

1. This report provides the Board with an overview of activities and issues for March.

Summary

2. I have spent the past month meeting with Senior Officials across government making a case for the development of an Integrated Data Platform. I have also spent a significant amount of my time meeting with colleagues from across government to discuss the emerging situation of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Review of recent activities

3. Important developments in recent weeks include the following:
 - i. On 27 February we presented our proposal to Number 10 for the future of the Integrated Data Platform, which had been agreed with colleagues from across the government at an initial meeting held on 25 February. The proposal is based on a twin track approach with two strongly interrelated threads:
 - **Track One:** A series of exploratory lighthouse projects that will engage with key users to deliver early exemplars in key policy and delivery areas. These will allow us to tackle existing organisation barriers and gain valuable knowledge to shape the systemic platform.
 - **Track Two:** The design and development of an Integrated Data Platform, providing the standards, tools and approaches needed to deliver cross government data sharing and analysis by default.
 - ii. Beyond this, on 9 March Iain Bell and Francesca Kay met with colleagues from across government to discuss an appropriate list of projects to be taken forward under the Integrated Data Platform. This, coupled with discussions post the Analysis Function Board, have meant a number of key departments and key analysts throughout the Civil Service have now been identified to be involved in development. Our next steps beyond this are to set up a steering group.
 - iii. As an outcome of the fortnightly Evaluation Steering Group meetings that I attend, ONS have seconded three members of staff to the Prime Minister's Implementation Unit to help assess the evaluation strategies for Spending Review bids.
 - iv. From 4 to 6 March I attended the United Nations Statistical Commission in the United States of America. Whilst in attendance, I met with colleagues from across the globe to discuss the latest developments in the field of statistics. In particular, I signed new memoranda of understanding with my counterparts from Ghana, Kenya and Rwanda; and discussed potential collaborations with Jordan and Sierra Leone. In addition, all my interventions were included in the final communique.
 - v. On 11 March, the UK budget was announced. Within this £5 million funding was announced to pump prime the Integrated Data Platform and £1.8 million was allocated for a Data Quality Centre for Excellence.
 - vi. I have attended a number of meetings to discuss the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of this, my colleagues have been outstanding in developing new statistics to inform government policy.

Future look

4. The focus for April will be to continue exploration of how ONS can provide timely and meaningful insights to help understand the impact of COVID-19 on society and the economy.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond, 17 March 2020

Developing a new strategy for the UK's statistical system – Update

Purpose

1. Building on previous Board discussions, this paper provides an update on progress towards the development of the next Authority strategy.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to:
 - i. review and discuss the proposed draft strategy and provide feedback via correspondence; and
 - ii. agree to continue the development, but delay the launch of the strategy until it can have maximum positive impact.

Background

3. Having endorsed proposals for the development of a single overarching strategy for the UK's statistical system for the period 2020-2025, the Board agreed for this to be co-created through consultation with colleagues from across the system. At its January meeting, the Board received initial analysis of responses alongside an outline strategy.
4. On review of a draft strategy, there was broad support for developing a strategy which set a radical direction for the statistical system. There was a call for it to be bolder, and exciting in language. The description of the system in particular was to be improved.
5. Taking on board this feedback, as well as the feedback from stakeholders, colleagues, and from the RSS public event we have made those changes to the strategy.

Discussion

Launch

6. Until now we have proposed launching the strategy at the end of April. I do not now think this is a good idea as:
 - i. a successful launch would need a significant internal communications push which cannot be achieved with the mass home working which is in place;
 - ii. a successful launch would require some stakeholder and public engagement which would have limited impact at present, and would perhaps present the Authority as being out of touch with current events; and
 - iii. the current work being undertaken in response to COVID-19 by the statistical system may provide a step change in the perception and capability of the statistical system, and may therefore require the strategy to be bolstered in certain areas.
7. For these reasons I propose delaying the launch of the strategy until later in the year, but continuing the development work. We will bring a typeset strategy document to the Board in April for a further discussion on timing and content.

Conclusion

8. The internal and external consultation across the statistical system has provided a rich level of analysis and set the context in which to develop an inclusive and ambitious new strategy.
9. It is recommended that the Board provide comment via correspondence with a view to finalising the strategy document and launching the strategy later in the year.

Douglas Cameron, Central Policy Secretariat, 19 March 2020

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

UK Statistics Authority Strategy

This document will be published on the UK Statistics Authority Website in due course:

<https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/strategy-and-business-plan/>

ONS Strategic Business Plan

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to set out the current draft of the ONS Strategic Business Plan, and seek the Authority Board's views on the content and structure of plan before developing a final draft, which will be submitted to the April Authority Board.

Recommendations

2. The Board is invited to:
 - i. review and comment on the current draft of the ONS Strategic Business Plan, in the context of the Authority Strategy; and
 - ii. note the work that continues and will be completed to finalise the Business Plan.

Background

3. The Board is considering the UK Statistics Authority strategy at this meeting, which sets out a strategy for the UK statistical system for the next five years to be Inclusive, Ambitious, Sustainable and Radical.
4. The Strategic Business Plan for the ONS that sits within this strategy and emphasises the key role that the ONS will have in delivering this strategy. This plan focusses on activities across the whole organisation rather than through individual business units.
5. An early draft of the plan, setting out the key areas of focus and strategic priorities for the ONS was discussed at the Authority Board in February. Since then we have focussed on developing an early view of the financial plan, developed an initial set of strategic and delivery objectives and progressed the workforce plan. We have also focussed on aligning the structure and presentation of the plan with the Authority Strategy and its content.
6. In addition, we have developed a Strategic Outline Case for the Integrated Data Platform project. This project received seed funding from the Treasury at the 11 March Budget to develop the case and the initial lighthouse projects in support of the programme.

Discussion

7. The plan sets out four key drivers that will be taken forward to bring a greater focus to ONS's business as follows:
 - i. Radical – A strategic shift towards cross-cutting analysis – to meet the evidence needs of policy makers, assess implementation and to facilitate evaluation of the impact of policy.
 - ii. Ambitious - Re-focussing on the quality, coherence, accessibility and inclusiveness of ONS's core statistical outputs and data spines that support the strategic shift towards cross-government analysis – National Accounts, Prices, Labour Market, Trade, Population and Migration, Household Income; Crime; and the Population, Address and Business Registers that will form the spines of the integrated evidence solution. This theme will include the successful delivery of the 2021 Census and crisper more thematic communication on our statistics.
 - iii. Sustainable - Prioritisation and efficiency across the organisation – to streamline the scope of the organisation and free up resources to focus on our strategic priorities.
 - iv. Inclusive - Developing an inclusive, high performing and collaborative organisational model and culture to develop the perspective and environment that will enable us to succeed.

8. By focussing on these areas, the ONS will make its contribution to improving the UK's reputation for trusted independent and high quality statistics and promoting the use of evidence.
9. The plan also describes out four business cases, which will form the basis of change through the Business Plan. These are:
 - i. the Integrated Data Platform, will form a key part of the future direction of the business;
 - ii. Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme – which was approved by HM Treasury at Full Business Case stage in July 2019;
 - iii. Economic Statistics Transformation Programme, which will be expanded to meet the Treasury's future requirements for the enhancement of Economic Statistics; and
 - iv. the Corporate Systems Improvement project – which will drive efficiencies across our back office through standardisation, streamlining and automating our processes.
10. These projects together with our baseline funding and the future case for the delivery of the Census benefits after the 2021 Census, will form the basis of our Spending Review bid.

Ongoing activities to deliver the plan

11. The following activities are underway to complete the plan:
 - i. finalisation of the strategic and portfolio level milestones, supported by a clear articulation of success against each of them – which will form the basis of the monitoring framework for the plan. These objectives are being developed by a cross organisational group and will be ready by the end of March;
 - ii. development of a strategic workforce plan for the skills and capabilities we will need – this process was started in early March and will be considered by the Strategic People Committee in April;
 - iii. detailed planning at a unit level to provide the framework that supports the delivery of these milestones; and
 - iv. allocation of costs to the thematic presentation of our outputs, with a clear identification of support costs.

Conclusion

12. This paper provides the latest draft of the ONS's Strategic Business Plan that will support the UK Statistics Authority Strategy. It is recommended that the Board provide comment via correspondence. The Board's comments on the draft will be fed into the final version that we are aiming to be ready for the April meeting.

Nick Bateson, Director of Finance, Planning and Performance, 18 March 2020

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

2019/20 ONS Strategic Business Plan

This document will be published on the UK Statistics Authority Website in due course:

<https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/strategy-and-business-plan/>

Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on the programme, focussing on the Census, its legislative progress and our statistical design (including the under-enumeration playbook). It also describes progress on the wider transformation including our responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to note:
 - i. the programme remains at amber rating reflecting positive progress. Challenges continue around data acquisition and development of technology delivery platforms; however, progress is being made in both areas;
 - ii. the lessons of the rehearsal have been incorporated into the Census operational and statistical design with changes being cost neutral. Supplier alignment and the design will be complete by the end of March;
 - iii. legislative timescales are tight, but we are currently on track to complete the Order and Regulations. We are awaiting further news on the Judicial Review; and
 - iv. responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted the whole programme. Planning is underway to mitigate risks to Census progress. Responses from Social Survey and Business Statistics Transformation have allowed us to fully utilise the transformed online methods in both our contingency effort and our ability to analyse the nationwide impact of the virus.

Discussion

Programme progress

3. The programme remains at amber. Census design and build is progressing well as we reach the stage of readying for build prioritisation with Digital Services and Technology (DST). We have incorporated the lessons learned from the rehearsal and are working closely with suppliers to finalise, cost and contract the final the design.
4. Both Business Statistics Transformation (BST) and Social Survey Transformation (SST) have accelerated transformation work in response to the COVID-19 contingency planning. Further details are provided at the end of this report.

Census Preparations and Under-enumeration strategy

5. The evaluation of lessons learned is now complete. Details were provided to the March Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, which has utilised feedback and input from across programme and suppliers. It shows that objectives of the Collection Rehearsal were met, and a significant number of lessons have been learned to allow us to enhance the operation for 2021. A more detailed evaluation will be published later this year.
6. Work has progressed to incorporate these lessons into the updated Census design. As previously described, this includes an update to the Wave of Contact model to effectively utilise paper reminders to increase response rates. This will allow for a more targeted focus on the field effort. At the end of February full consultation was held with our key suppliers to understand the cost and logistical implications of the changes proposed. This work will be complete by end March 2020 and these changes will be cost-neutral.
7. The updated Statistical Design has been developed to work in parallel with our Operational Design. The two designs work together to ensure we can meet our quality

targets. We have a three-phase approach our Census Statistical Design takes and includes the under-enumeration strategy to be used when problems arise:

- i. minimise through design – minimising the undercount, through effective address lists, questionnaire design, operational design, wave of contact and engagement models;
 - ii. monitor/counter during the operation– using live information to feed business intelligence to drive the most effective response by field force and community engagement; and
 - iii. process/estimate the remaining undercount – using the Census Coverage Survey, data cleaning, coverage estimate and quality assurance to estimate and adjust coverage.
8. For each of these stages administrative data is at the heart of our work and this Census will utilise administrative data at all stages. This includes Council Tax data for accurate address lists, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Valuation Office data that replaces questions and is integrated into the Census and used during live. This allows us to monitor undercounts, develop engagement strategies and administrative-based population estimates in parallel and used to help in processing and estimation. Since the last Board meeting, we have undertaken a thorough review of administrative data to ensure sufficient time remains to complete the work but will need tight management to ensure successful delivery. We are setting up the governance to do this.
9. As we approach the end of this design phase, we are working with DST to start to prioritise elements of the build. This will ensure we are able to focus build attention in the most important areas and that, for example, our White Paper Commitments are met. The main build will continue to September. Testing will be taking place in parallel to the build, then from September, full end to end and operational readiness testing will commence. As we enter the main build phase, we are bringing together all elements into a series of metrics to demonstrate build and test progress. As agreed, we will share these with the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.
10. The Processing and Outputs Rehearsal continues at pace. We have just completed the third of 11 sprints. These will allow the teams to iterative build and test the platforms, systems and methods required to process 2021 Census data. It will also allow us to develop and prove these systems and ensure we can meet our commitment of first results in a year. There have been some technical issues both with the simulated data we have been using and with the platform. These are being actively addressed and at present they do not threaten the timetable for the rehearsal and are under active management. Metrics on progress have been presented to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

Legislative update and the judicial review

11. The Census Order was laid in Parliament on 2 March 2020 and will lie in the House for 40 days (excluding recesses). During this time, it will be debated either in committee or on the floor of the House in both the Commons and the Lords. The Order will need to be approved by the Privy Council before the Census Regulations can be laid. The regulations set out the content of the questions and the detailed operational methodology to be used during the Census; separate Regulations are laid for England in Parliament (by the UK Government) and for Wales in the National Assembly (by Welsh Ministers).

Wider Transformation

12. The wider transformation has been affected by the planning of responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both SST and BST have been working hard to respond to the ask. This has enabled us to progress some transformation work faster than anticipated. As a result, we will push the Labour Market Survey online by the end of March 2020. By Friday 20 March 2020 we will also be standing up a special Opinion survey. The BST

teams have been working in conjunction with DST colleagues to stand up a new online survey for businesses to gauge the impact of the pandemic.

13. All teams have managed to accommodate the extra work without impacting the development of Census, with some undertaking additional weekend working. We are ensuring that this peak in work is managed carefully.
14. Following the update to the Authority Board in January surrounding the milestones being reported within BST and SST, a deep dive review was commissioned. This review was reported and accepted in full by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. One milestone will remain red for SST (as a result of detailed data for the Household Financial Survey) and one red will remain for BST (as a result of Distributive Trades (Dtrades) functionality).
15. DST and BST teams have been working hard to improve the confidence around the technology platforms required for Dtrades. They now have an improved and more assured position, and are planning for a DTrades alpha version by June with a beta version by October.

Iain Bell, Deputy National Statistician for Population and Public Policy
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12 March 2020