

**UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY**

*Minutes*

**Thursday 26 February 2026**

**London Office**

**Hybrid Meeting**

**Members Present**

Penny Young (Chair)

Dr. Jacob Abboud

Peter Barron

Ed Humpherson

Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter

Professor Mairi Spowage

Darren Tierney

Dr. Sarah Walsh

**Other Attendees**

James Benford

Jason Bradbury (for item 9)

June Bowman

Megan Cooper (for item 10)

Kate Davies (for item 11)

Dr Sarah Cumbers (for item 9)

Lucinda Eggleton (for item 6)

Mary Gregory

Sarah Jennings (observer)

Alex Lambert (for items 11&12)

Jane Naylor (for item 9)

Ian O'Sullivan (for item 12)

Tom Taylor

**Apologies**

Professor Dame Carol Propper

**Secretariat**

Sally Jones

Harlan Matthews

## **1. Apologies**

- 1.1 Apologies were noted from Professor Dame Carol Propper.

## **2. Declarations of Interest**

- 2.1. Ed Humpherson informed the meeting that he had joined the Ada Lovelace Institute's Oversight Board. There is no conflict of interest with this Board.

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

- 3.1. The minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 January were agreed.

## **4. Report from the Authority Chair [SA(26)09]**

- 4.1. The Chair reported on her activities since the Board last met, highlighting the ongoing work to consider the Board's priorities for the next six months including engagement with the Deputy Heads of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) and Chief Statisticians of the Devolved Governments. The Board set out its priorities in its letter to UK Statistical System in October. As part of the Non-Executive Director programme of activities a session had been held on the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS).
- 4.2. The appointment process for the National Statistician was ongoing and the planning underway for the next NED recruitment.

## **5. Report from the Permanent Secretary [SA(26)10]**

- 5.1. Darren Tierney provided the Board with an overview of activity and issues since the last Board meeting highlighting the following:
  - i. the National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority had undertaken a Gateway Review of the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) and this would be circulated to the Board;
  - ii. the Integrated Data Service Lessons Learned provided useful generic learning for ongoing ONS transformation programmes, and again, would be shared with the Board;
  - iii. following a recruitment process Henry Watson had been appointed as ONS Chief People Officer and Director for People and Places Directorate, and the process for the Director General for Digital, Data and Technology was near completion;
  - iv. the outcome of the prioritisation process had been announced, following engagement with users;
  - v. the business planning process across the organisation had continued at pace including a series of cross-organisational workshops. The final stage of planning would include key prioritisation decisions. The draft business plan was scheduled for March Board; and
  - vi. the key milestone achieved at the end of January in the Economic Statistics Plan (ESP) with the introduction of supermarket scanner data into the production of consumer price statistics from March 2026.
- 5.2. Members discussed the update and highlighted the importance of effectively managing the emerging forecast year end position 2025/26. The forecast budget underspend at year end was being considered by the finance team alongside the Senior Leadership Team. The Executive Committee had earlier agreed an approach to mitigate the underspend but not all had been able to be deployed partly due to constraints around capacity and critical skills. It was noted that on conclusion of the review of the strategic risk profile the finance strategic risk would be split into two risks. One risk would be in relation to finance and one in relation to delivery of ambition, with a proposal to increase the risk appetite to reflect the organisation's willingness to take more risk in relation to finance and delivery. This approach would help inform the Authority's financial risk appetite clearly at an earlier point in the financial year when considering 2026/27 budgets. Improving forecasting across the organisation would also be a key area of focus for the finance team. Members noted the need to consider and reflect the

progress made over the last year as part of the preparation of the annual report and accounts. Delivery of the Internal Audit Programme 2025/26 would inform the Head of Internal Audit (HIA) annual opinion. There was no indication at this point of this year's HIA year end opinion. It was noted that other key areas of focus for the senior leadership team included management of projects and programmes underpinned by an effective operating model to ensure sustainable delivery. In discussion the Board noted the importance of attending to audit actions.

- 5.3. The Board heard that the Permanent Secretary was in the process of meeting all directors to discuss their local people survey action plans in response to the People Survey 2025. As part of the organisation wide response a flexible pay case was in development to help address the issues around pay, while acknowledging that pay generally was the lowest scoring answer across the majority of government departments. Nevertheless, the Board were keen to understand why scores were particularly low for the Authority relative to other departments.
- 5.4. With regard to the performance report, specifically the level of ONS official statistics accreditations suspended by the Office for Statistics Regulation, it was agreed that further information would be provided for the Board on the wider context of de-accreditations, how many were dependent on or related to the TLFS development, and OSR's future plans for assessments of ONS statistics.

## **6. Report from the National Statistician's Office [SA(26)11]**

- 6.1. Lucinda Eggleton provided an update on activities across the National Statistician's Office (NSO) highlighting the following:
  - i. the ONS Executive Committee had agreed reporting lines of the National Statistician's Advisory Committees in the absence of a National Statistician;
  - ii. following an open competition, Jakob Schneebacher from the Institute for Fiscal Studies had been appointed as a new panel member to the Methodological Assurance Review Panel;
  - iii. the National Statistician's Inclusive Data Advisory Committee reviewed and provided comments on the Ethnicity Harmonisation Consultation. These criteria were subsequently considered and endorsed by the Ad Hoc Assurance Panel convened in the absence of a National Statistician;
  - iv. winners of the Analysis in Government awards had been announced at the end of January including 10 GSS projects as winners, runners-up or highly commended; and
  - v. the United Nations Statistical Commission scheduled early March with ONS having strong representation.
- 6.2. The Board noted the report and thanks to Lucinda Eggleton and Henry Watson for their work on the NSO operating model following discussion at the last meeting. The outcome would be considered at the March meeting. It was agreed that a report on the UN Statistical Commission would also be provided for the next meeting. With regard to the work on sex harmonised standard members continued to be concerned at the pace of work and the need for practical guidance for statistical producers.

## **7. Report from the Director General for Regulation [SA926)12]**

- 7.1. Ed Humpherson updated the Board on the work by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) since the last meeting. Ed had given evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee on Integrity and Ethics on 24 February.
- 7.2. OSR had published its findings from its review of ONS's family spending statistics, which were derived from the living costs and food survey, concluding that they could continue to be published as accredited official statistics. James Benford highlighted the potential delay to the publication of household disposable income planned in March.

- 7.3. With regard to casework OSR had written to the Secretary of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry about the presentation of modelling in the Executive Summary of the Module 2 report of the UK Covid-19 Inquiry highlighting that the wording chosen for the Executive Summary was a misleading representation of the underlying analysis.
- 7.4. The Board noted the report and would be updated on the potential delay to the publication of disposable income.

## **8. Communications Update**

- 8.1. Peter Barron and Sarah Moore reported on recent media coverage and stakeholder sentiment since the last meeting. Media coverage was slightly less in January relating to the lower number of publications and less opportunity for ONS coverage. A proactive approach had been taken to the announcement on 28 January on scanner data, which would be used for consumer prices from March. Liz McKeown had reported on economic statistics on Radio 4 Today interview which had been picked up by 5Live and Radio 2. Other areas covered in February included the census topic consultation and outcome of ONS prioritisation.

## **9. Government Statistical Service [SA(26)13]**

- 9.1. The Chair welcomed Jane Naylor and Jason Bradbury, Deputy Head of the GSS and Dr Sarah Cumbers, Chief Executive Officer of the Royal Statistical Society. Jane Naylor and Jason Bradbury provided an update on the implementation of the GSS Vision 'Strength in Numbers', with a focus on the proposals for a GSS leadership development programme and reflections on the Future Statistician work undertaken with the Royal Statistical Society.
- 9.2. The Chair noted thanks on behalf of the Board to Jane Naylor, Jason Bradbury and Steve Ellerd-Elliott for all of their work as Deputy Heads of the GSS. The Chair had joined the GSS Community Call on 12 February, which had provided the opportunity to present a perspective from the Board. The Chair commended the work co-developed by Deputy Heads of the GSS with the RSS with the report on the Future Statistician published on 10 February.
- 9.3. Ed Humpherson noted thanks to Deputy Heads of GSS and GSS colleagues for their professional commitment demonstrated in embracing the refreshed Code of Practice for Statistics.
- 9.4. Members discussed the update. The following comments were made in discussion:
- i. the importance and value of continuing professional development to support each career stage of government statisticians with full support for the approach outlined. Anecdotal feedback reflected a range of experiences;
  - ii. the issues of pay and progression and the need to maximise opportunities for movement by statisticians across the statistical system including mentoring, shadowing, secondments and working across teams, in the context of headcount reductions across departments and a small number of Senior Civil Service statistical roles (at pay band three);
  - iii. the need to inspire the next generation of future statisticians and establish a clear, sustainable talent pipeline, which would support long-term career pathways within the GSS with a focus on senior talent pipelines;
  - iv. the value of opportunities for statisticians to volunteer for Task and Finish Groups, such as the opportunity offered by the Deputy Head of GSS role;
  - v. the impact of the GSS Fast Stream as an accelerated development programme to senior leadership. Feedback suggested that those on the fast stream sometimes choose to leave the programme early to take alternative opportunities; and
  - vi. empowering statisticians to counter misinformation and build public trust by developing communication strategies and skills, working alongside the RSS and OSR.

9.5. The Board noted thanks for the work undertaken and endorsed the approach and next steps for taking forward a GSS leadership development/talent management programme, noting that support would need to be provided by the National Statistician's Office. This work would be a core part of the National Statistician role. The Board supported the next steps on the Future Statistician role noting that the review and update of the competency frameworks through the GSS People Advisory Group would be a significant task. It was clarified that the timeline for implementation could take up to two years to be fully embedded.

## **10. Economic Statistics Plan [SA(26)14]**

10.1. Megan Cooper introduced a paper which provided an update on delivery of the ESP including risks and challenges. Areas of challenge relating to red milestones included the adoption of the Statistical Business Register, Annual Survey of Hours and Earning (ASHE) transformation and trade in goods methodology review. It was acknowledged that delivery of the plan was dependent on capacity from enabling partners across ONS. The ONS Executive Committee were actively managing prioritisation decisions in relation to constrained resources. An audit of ESP governance and delivery was ongoing and would report to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee in May.

10.2. Members discussed the update. The following comments were made in discussion:

- i. sequencing of the next ESP publication in April had been agreed to ensure members had the opportunity to comment at the right time ahead of publication;
- ii. key performance indicators would be incorporated into the April publication. It would also set out progress delivery including the scale of delay;
- iii. an integrated baseline plan with milestones for ESP and SIEP would be produced following the business planning process;
- iv. the business planning process would help inform sequencing of work, placing some activity in the 'waiting room', in order to focus on highest priority areas to address quality issues, (informed by the tiering framework for surveys and statistics);
- v. the importance of stakeholder engagement and transparent communications for stakeholders and users; and
- vi. the work on population statistics current red milestones related to the need for more engagement around developing new fertility assumptions. It was clarified that the work would assume the policy stays the same, (that the projections are primarily driven by past demographic trends rather than government policy levers), which had been the approach taken for improved migration methods for long term migration statistics.

10.3. The Board noted the update. It was agreed that further information would be provided for the Board on trade in methodology review. The next quarterly update on delivery planned for April was scheduled for March Board meeting.

## **11. Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan [SA(26)15]**

11.1. Kate Davies introduced a paper which provided an update on delivery of the Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan with a focus on business surveys.

11.2. As already discussed in the meeting challenges relating to the adoption of the Statistical Business Register and ASHE transformation were being managed. An independent review of the Statistical Business Register (SBR) project was ongoing. The Executive Committee were managing prioritisation decisions around limited digital services resources – and had agreed an approach to digital resources for both the Census Test and International Annual Business Survey (IABS) to maximise delivery across both areas of work. It was noted that legacy systems remain a risk to delivery of the SIEP. Prioritisation as part of the business planning process would help mitigate this risk.

- 11.3. With regard to business survey non-response and enforcement approach for large businesses a streamlined and educational approach to enforcement was being piloted and proving effective.
- 11.4. Members discussed the update. The following comments were made in discussion:
- i. the ongoing work to deliver ONS recovery plans would help address legacy issues, including the work on the SBR, IABS and TLFS;
  - ii. prioritisation as part of business planning would help inform a longer term plan to address legacy issues; and
  - iii. the strategic approach to legacy transformation would need a business change approach with integrated planning across the organisation.
- 11.5. The Board noted the update and endorsed the refreshed approach to the enforcement approach for large businesses.

## **12. Social Survey Strategy [SA(26)16]**

- 12.1. Alex Lambert and Ian O'Sullivan introduced a paper which set out the proposed scope for an ONS social survey strategy. The strategy would be made up of two parts: a long-term vision and a strategic roadmap focused on survey system recovery. A five to ten year view that sets out the strategic direction towards achieving a sustainable survey system. As part of the process to develop the strategy discussions would focus on a range of fundamental questions, which would be considered in the first instance by ONS's Strategic Design Committee. A report would then be provided to the Board to discuss the view on the long term strategy.
- 12.2. Members discussed the proposed scope for the strategy and highlighted the opportunity to engage with other large social research organisations, including academia and global commercial companies. It was noted that the aim was to strengthen ONS capability with both internal and external engagement. An additional strategic perspective that would be useful related to the citizen experience.
- 12.3. The Board noted the paper and would remain engaged in this work with a paper to the Board in July for comment on the developing strategy.

## UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

### Agenda

Thursday 26 February, 11.00-14.30

London Boardroom,  
Hybrid Meeting

**Chair:** Penny Young

**Apologies:** Dame Carol Propper

**Attendees:** Jason Bradbury (for item 7), Megan Cooper (for item 14), Dr. Sarah Cumbers (for item 7), Kate Davies (for item 9), Alex Lambert (for item 10), Jane Naylor, (for item 7), Ian O'Sullivan (for item 10)

**NED Session:** 10.30-11.00

1 11.00-11.05 5 mins	Minutes and matters arising from previous meeting Declarations of interest	Meeting of 29.01.2026
2 11.05-11.25 20 mins	Report from the Authority Chair <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Authority Priorities</li></ul>	SA(26)09 Penny Young
3 11.25-11.35 10 mins	Report from the Permanent Secretary	SA(26)10 Darren Tierney
4 11.35-11.45 10 mins	Report from the National Statistician's Office	SA(26)11 Lucinda Eggleton
5 11.45-11.55 10 mins	Report from the Director General for Regulation	SA(26)12 Ed Humpherson
6 11.55-12.05 10 mins	Communications update	Oral update Peter Barron Sarah Moore
12.05-12.30 25 mins	Break	
7 12.30-12.55 25 mins	Government Statistical Service – Leadership Development and Future Statistician Engagement	SA(26)13 Jason Bradbury Jane Naylor Sarah Cumbers
8 12.55-13.25 30 mins	Economic Statistics Plan	SA(26)14 James Benford Megan Cooper
9 13.25-13.50 25 mins	Survey Improvement Enhancement Plan	SA(26)15 Kate Davies
10 13.50-14.15 25 mins	Social Survey Strategy	SA(26)16 Alex Lambert Ian O'Sullivan
11 14.15-14.30 15 mins	Any Other Business	

**Next meeting: Thursday 26 March, London Boardroom**

# UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(26)09

## *Chair's Report, February 2026*

### **Purpose**

1. This paper provides the Authority Board with an overview of the Interim Chair's activity in February. We will have an opportunity under this item to discuss our priorities as a Board in the coming months.

### **Review of recent activities**

2. On 3 February, I met with Jason Bradbury, Steve Ellerd-Elliott, and Jane Naylor (Deputy Heads of the Government Statistical System (GSS)). I updated them on progress at the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Authority, and thanked them for their guidance and help in the absence of a permanent National Statistician. We also discussed progress on the GSS Vision, which they explained to colleagues at the GSS Community Call on 12 February, and on which I also joined to present a perspective from the Authority Board. We have the opportunity at our February meeting to discuss GSS leadership development and future statistician capability with them.
3. On 9 February, I wrote to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) with the findings of the recent Board Effectiveness Review and wider organisational transformation. We do not yet have a publication date for their inquiry into the work of the Authority. This letter accompanied another from Darren Tierney outlining progress at ONS.
4. On 10 February, I met with John Pullinger (former National Statistician) to discuss shared challenges in his current role as Chair of the Electoral Commission and reflect on progress at ONS.
5. On 11 February, I joined ONS Direct with James Benford, a live interactive session with over 1000 staff participating. I gave an overview of the Board's strategic focus this year, and we took several questions, including on pay and common technical challenges for analysts. Non-executive directors (NEDs) are welcome to join such sessions if they are able.
6. On 11 February, I joined an all-staff call with the National Statistician's Office (NSO) to explain the setup of a group to consider the design of the office into a new, smaller form with clear purposes supported by areas of expertise. With Darren, I also took questions from staff. We expect recommendations to come to the March Board.
7. An ad-hoc short-term panel has been convened to assure key GSS guidance in the absence of a National Statistician. I chaired the first meeting with members comprising at least one non-executive director (Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter, Professor Dame Carol Propper or Professor Mairi Spowage), and members of the executive: Darren Tierney, Mary Gregory and James Benford, with Lucinda Eggleton attending where the subject matter is relevant for the NSO. The panel convened on 11 February to consider the proposed evaluation criteria and decision-making process for assessing additional ethnic group tick-box options in the new ethnicity harmonised standard. They agreed the guidance after some minor amends to ensure clarity to the user. Harmonised standards are an important part of the work of the NSO – I am conscious the Board is keen to see the NSO considering how robust standards can be developed as efficiently as possible.
8. On 12 February I joined NEDs in a session led by Alex Lambert to discuss progress of the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS). This was a welcome opportunity for NEDs to engage in the programme as we approach a key decision point in July and planned communications in March.

9. On 12 February I met with Dr. Sarah Cumbers, CEO of the Royal Statistical Society, to provide an update on progress at the Authority and discuss our shared ambition with users in advancing the themes identified at the inaugural UK Statistics Assembly. The Board will have an opportunity to discuss progress on Assembly actions in an upcoming Board meeting.

### **Correspondence**

10. On 10 February I responded to a letter from Conservative shadow ministers Sir James Cleverly MP, Andrew Griffith MP, and James Wild MP, on the communication of changes to Business Rates in the 2025 Budget.

### **Looking ahead**

11. On 24 February, Darren and I will attend an introductory meeting with our responsible minister, Satvir Kaur MP, who takes up the role as she returns from maternity leave.
12. On 24 and 25 February, I will join the panel to assess candidates for the role of National Statistician in their interviews at the Cabinet Office. The last interview with a candidate is in mid-March.
13. On 25 February, I will have an introductory meeting with our newly appointed Director for Strategy and Change, Sarah Jennings.

**Penny Young, Interim Chair, 19 February 2026**

**Permanent Secretary's Report, February 2026**

**Purpose**

1. This provides the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) with an overview of activity since the last Board meeting on 29 January 2026.

**This month, I concluded recruitment activity for the final two posts in my senior leadership team, reinforcing our leadership capabilities across the organisation**

2. This month, I was pleased to announce that, following an extensive recruitment campaign, Henry Watson has been appointed as the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Chief People Officer and Director for People and Places Directorate (PPD). Henry's experience will be vital in supporting the delivery of change to our culture and ways of working. I look forward to continuing to work with Henry as he helps us establish meaningful change for ONS and build an organisation in which everyone can thrive.
3. We have also concluded the recruitment process for the Director General for Digital, Data and Technology and have identified a suitable candidate for this post. I hope to announce the result from this campaign in due course, following Cabinet Secretary approval.
4. These posts mark the conclusion of recruitment into my top team, and I feel confident that I have the right people in the right place to help ONS deliver on its core priorities.

**Prioritisation and business planning ensure that we can devote resources to our improvement work**

5. This month, I announced the prioritisation measures we will be taking to ensure our focus on delivering high quality economic and social statistics. The measures will streamline our portfolio and consolidate publications, as we work to restore confidence in our most critical statistics. This announcement followed close engagement with users across health, subnational and areas of economic statistics relevant to government departments, reducing our outputs in these areas over the immediate period while we focus on recovery. In response to user feedback, we will continue to run the Annual Population Survey (APS), which reflects ONS outputs at the local and regional level. Longer term, we will seek to address user needs currently met via the APS through the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS).
6. Business planning has continued to progress at pace through January and February with a series of cross-organisational workshops held to understand the scale of business-driven demand; the technical, financial and wider capacity feasibility of delivering the demand; and how we could breakdown the totality of demand into a sequenced, realistic set of options.
7. We are now entering the final stages of planning where difficult choices will need to be made to balance the need to further enhance core statistical production with the need to drive mid-long term operational and financial sustainability. Whilst the Census funding structure offers us a transitory opportunity to invest over the next one to two years, the investment choices we make now will be critical to setting us on a trajectory for a multi-year period.

**As we progress with discussions around office attendance, I am keen that we are doing the work now to ensure we build a workforce fit for the future**

8. We continue to make positive progress on resolution of the office attendance dispute, having combined our negotiations with Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) and Prospect into a single process. Final key elements of the wording are now being

worked through prior to the unions putting the proposed principles to their members for ballot.

9. This month, the Executive Committee (ExCo) have considered how we can further optimise the use of our current office locations. Our new sites in Manchester and Darlington have rapidly reached capacity as currently configured, so consideration is needed on how we manage these effectively to meet the future workforce requirements of the business.
10. Colleagues in PPD are running focus groups with Heads of Profession and senior leaders to further understand our current capability levels and explore future skill requirements. This will allow us to better understand the capability gaps across the organisation and put an approach in place which enables us to grow, maintain and develop the technical skills we need.

**Progress continues to be made with our recovery plans and business-as-usual work**

11. At the end of January, we reached a key milestone in our Economic Statistics Plan (ESP) by announcing the 'go' decision to introduce supermarket scanner data into the production of our consumer price statistics, from March 2026. This new approach will improve the quality of these important economic statistics, which underpin some of the UK's most critical decisions.
12. Our proactive communications activity centred around this announcement, as well as the census topic consultation deadline, generated positive coverage in a range of media, including reference to our recovery efforts, leading to a third consecutive month of improving external sentiment.
13. The delivery model for the ESP continues to evolve as we look to strengthen assurance, oversight, planning and evaluation. The appointment of Megan Cooper as Director for Economic Statistics Improvement provides a clear senior lead for delivery and assurance of ESP. The audit of the plan is ongoing with stakeholder interviews currently taking place. An update on this, and the delivering confidence assessments, will be provided in the next quarterly update.
14. Earlier this month, the National Infrastructure & Service Transformation Authority (NISTA) delivered the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) External Gateway Report. Among the recommendations within the report were to confirm and document critical user needs, and to implement a robust communications strategy. The review team noted that a 2027 transition for the core TLFS appears feasible, but that major technical risks remain.
15. Work is continuing at pace to prepare for the planned 2027 Census Test including scoping of requirements and commercial engagement. Colleagues in the Census programme are working closely with PPD to build the capability and capacity to stand up the programme, whilst working to mitigate impact on delivery elsewhere in the organisation. Where the most critical gaps are identified, we will look at requesting reprioritisation of existing specialist ONS resource to ensure the critical delivery path is maintained.

**Darren Tierney, Permanent Secretary, 19 February 2026**

*National Statistician's Report, February 2026*

**Purpose**

1. This paper provides the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) with an overview of the National Statistician's Office (NSO), and wider Government Statistical Service (GSS), activity since the last Board meeting on 29 January 2026. The National Statistician's Report will continue over the coming months whilst recruitment for a permanent National Statistician is ongoing.

**National Statistician's Committees and Panels**

2. Following an open competition, the **Methodological Assurance Review Panel (MARP)** recently appointed Jakob Schneebacher from the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) as a new panel member. He replaces Carl Emmerson and brings specific economic expertise to the panel.
3. On 12 February 2026, a MARP meeting was held in London. Productive conversations took place on a range of topics, including: research to evaluate and explore the implementation of an indexing first approach to data linkage; developing quality methods to identify and measure error in the demographic index; producing disability estimates for England using predictive modelling and administrative data; and Social Survey Strategy scoping.
4. Following January's extraordinary meeting, the **National Statistician's Inclusive Data Advisory Committee (NSIDAC)** have provided comments on the inclusivity of the revised interim GSS Harmonisation sex statement.
5. NSIDAC also responded to both the Census Topic Consultation and the Ethnicity Harmonisation Consultation via a letter to Penny Young, Interim Chair, in the absence of a National Statistician.
6. To note, a paper went to, and was agreed by, Executive Committee ExCo setting out the **proposed reporting lines of the National Statistician's Advisory Committees and Panels** in the absence of a National Statistician. A more substantial review of these groups will take place over the next few months, but from March 2026, updates from these committees and panels will reach the Board via the new reporting lines.

**NSO Activity and Engagement**

7. At the end of January 2025, the NSO successfully secured a partnership with Hopkins Van Mil to conduct the **Young Voices Insight Project**. The Centre for Equalities and Inclusion will deliver five focus group discussions with 11–24-year-olds in England and Wales across February and March 2026. The project will explore young people's perspectives on sharing their views with government organisations, both online and in person, about different areas of life that are important to them. Gaining a better understanding of what may prevent and support young people from participating and sharing their views can support any identified barriers being addressed, ensuring that young people's voices meaningfully inform the policies that impact their lives. Findings will inform Census 2031, social surveys and cross-government initiatives.
8. A new **GSS Coherence Strategy** is in development. This will address recommendations raised by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) and the UK Statistics Assembly.
9. I met with **Statistics Finland** on 2 February 2026. The meeting was productive in considering how the UK and Finland are approaching UN and European organisations as Finland is replacing Switzerland on the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) Bureau

and co-chairing the Data Governance Working group alongside Saudi Arabia. Statistics Finland is very engaged in work on innovation and responsible Artificial Intelligence (AI) and relies heavily on the use of admin data for statistical production. This is an interesting area for future collaboration and will be further explored by colleagues attending UNSC in March.

10. Responsibility for the **Health Insights Survey (HIS)** successfully transferred from the NSO to the Social, Local and Census Statistics Directorate in the Population, Census and Social Statistics Group on 2 February 2026.
11. A delegation from the **National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic** visited the ONS offices from 2 to 4 February 2026 as part of our work with the FCDO's Effective Governance for Economic Development in Central Asia (EGED) programme. The sessions covered a wide range of topics, including Building a National Statistical System, led by Jane Naylor, Deputy Head of the GSS, and Government Data Management, where Data Growth and Operations (DGO) colleagues were joined by Jenny Brooker, Chief Data Architect at the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). James Benford also met with Chairman Baktybek Kudaibergenov for a high-level bilateral meeting about our future collaboration and where we can learn from each other.
12. The **Ethnicity Harmonisation Consultation** closed on 4 February 2026 with over 1400 responses received. The Ad Hoc Assurance Panel met on 11 February to review the Ethnicity Harmonisation Consultation evaluation criteria. Confirmation of sign off was received on 17 February 2026 meaning the analysis of consultation responses can start.

### **Broader UK Statistical System**

13. Winners of the [Analysis in Government awards](#) were announced at the end of January 2026, showcasing the good quality analysis being undertaken across the analytical professions over the last year. Ten GSS projects were recognised as winners, runners-up or highly commended, spanning all award categories.
14. Following the success of the awards, the Analysis Function (AF) team have started taking expressions of interest for content for this year's **Analysis in Government Month** taking place in May. This is the UK's largest learning and development event for all government analysts. The theme for this year is Impact in Action.
15. The AF AI working group met on 21 January 2026 to finalise high-level plans for the **AF AI Hub** on the AF website. This will include outputs from the recent AF/GO-Science mini conference. The group also agreed what actions are needed around variable risk appetite & governance for using AI tools.
16. Following the AF Data Access working group meeting in January, work has progressed on developing the **data sharing taxonomy**. This has helped focus discussions on barriers to data sharing, including at the most recent meeting on 18 February 2026. The AF team are also linking up with the Administrative Data GSS Steering Group and the National Data Library team in DSIT to ensure joined up working across government.
17. Work is underway to prepare for the next **AF People Board** meeting taking place in March will agree the key capability challenges across the analytical professions which need addressing over the coming year. Work continues on creating the 2026 Strategic Workforce Data Product.
18. The GSS have published an [update to the GSS Vision](#). This looks back on what was achieved in 2025 as well as setting out priorities for 2026 (which were discussed with the UK Statistics Authority Board in December 2025). These include: GSS leadership and governance; embracing modern approaches and techniques, including AI; and inspiring the next generation of future statisticians.
19. A priority for 2025 was a collaboration between the GSS and the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) to consider the future role of the statistician. [The Future Statistician](#)

[report](#) was published on 10 February 2026 and work has started to implement key actions, responding to the need to think about the future of the GSS. The Deputy Heads of the GSS will focus on this work with the RSS in their Board paper, as well as proposals for a **GSS leadership talent programme** to support a senior talent pipeline.

20. Discussions have been held with GSS Heads of Professions (HoPs) to put in place **mandatory objectives** and a route for feedback to ensure all HoPs have support and recognition for the work they lead on cross GSS initiatives.
21. The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero (DESNZ) ran a **Clean Power 2030 hackathon** to develop new ways of measuring consumer-led energy flexibility across electric vehicles (EVs), electric heating and solar-plus-battery homes. The event created proof-of-concept tools, with the winning prototype identifying homes with solar and batteries and estimating their flexible demand from limited data. The best ideas will feed into a monitoring toolkit.

**Lucinda Eggleton, Director, National Statistician's Office, 19 February 2026**

***Update from the Director General for Regulation***

**Purpose**

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

**Discussion**

2. Key regulatory activities since the last board meeting include:
3. We are writing a letter to Ben Henshall, the Head of Analysis in 10 Downing Street regarding the steps they are taking in relation to the [Chair's letter on the Review of Intelligent Transparency](#).
4. We have published the [OSR Response to ONS Reports on Progress with Economic Statistics, December 2025](#). We welcome the evidence of early progress presented by Office for National Statistics (ONS) in its first quarterly reports and reflected in decisions on re-prioritisation in the autumn. Our report sets out further recommendations on additional steps that ONS can take to increase transparency on its progress. Given the comparatively short time between progress updates and our response, we expect ONS to iteratively implement these recommendations in the next two quarterly updates.
5. We have published the findings from our review of ONS's family spending statistics, which are derived from the living costs and food survey. We concluded that these statistics could continue to be published as accredited official statistics. We expect ONS to report on its progress against the recommendations for improvement set out in this compliance review by April 2026. [Compliance review of Family Spending statistics – Office for Statistics Regulation](#).
6. Following recent changes to definitions and a shift in reporting frequency we carried out a compliance review of Public Health Scotland's statistics on inpatient, day case and outpatient stage of waiting times. The findings of this review are published here: [Compliance review of inpatient, day case and outpatient stage of treatment waiting times produced by Public Health Scotland – Office for Statistics Regulation](#)

**Casework**

7. We have only opened three cases so far in February taking our total for the year so far to 139. The Chair wrote a public response to a case on Business Tax rates: [Penny Young to Sir James Cleverly MP, Andrew Griffith MP and James Wild MP – changes to Business Rates](#)
8. We hope to publish a response to Craig Hoy MSP shortly regarding a concern with the Scottish Governments Budget funding statement.
9. We are writing to the [Covid-19 inquiry regarding the presentation of statistical modelling](#) in the Executive Summary of its Module two report. We are not questioning the inquiry's conclusions but are highlighting the risk that the chosen wording is a misleading representation of the underlying analysis and associated uncertainty. This is a significant intervention that reinforces the importance of not putting undue weight on modelling outputs, particularly where the detail of the modelling is not well understood or communicated.

**Engagement**

10. In addition to my usual round of engagements with heads of profession and chief analysts in Government, I have given talks to the Department of Culture Media and

Sports (DCMS) analysts on the new Code of Practice; and spoken at a joint round table with the RSS on user engagement.

11. I have also given my talk on openness and vulnerability to both Statistics Flanders and to ONS staff.

### **Issues on my mind**

12. I am giving evidence to a The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) evidence session on Integrity and Ethics on Tuesday 24 February. My aim is to emphasise the importance of integrity in the use of statistics in Government, including by Ministers.
13. Population statistics are an increasing area of attention for OSR, in the light of the changes to the approach to mid-year estimates discussed at last month's Board. I have invited Mary Gregory to share ONS's plans with us in advance of the March Regulation committee.
14. We have begun our regulatory work on our annual State of the Statistical System report and intend to publish in early 2026 publication as usual. I propose that the newly appointed National Statistician, given their overarching leadership role, owns any recommendations concerning the future strategic direction of the statistics system.
15. We continue to prepare for the 2026 elections in Scotland and Wales. We are preparing explainers on key statistical issues that may arise and have filmed some content for social media on how votes can identify the potential misuse of statistics in campaign material and public debate. We are also preparing a letter for the Chair to send to the leaders of political parties, setting out our expectations as we have done in for previous Elections.

**Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, OSR, 18 February 2026**

***Government Statistical Service: Vision Implementation, Leadership Development, and Future Statistician Engagement***

**Purpose**

1. This paper provides the UK Statistics Authority Board with an update on the implementation of the Government Statistical Service (GSS Vision), 'Strength in Numbers'. Following discussion with the chair, it also provides more information on proposals for a GSS leadership development programme and reflections on the Future Statistician work we have been undertaking with the Royal Statistical Society (RSS). We also include reflections on our roles as Deputy Heads of the GSS based on a short survey conducted recently of Heads of Profession.

**Recommendations**

2. Members of the Board are invited to:
  - i. note the progress with implementing the GSS Vision and achievements across each pillar and provide any strategic guidance/ advocacy for the next phase of implementation;
  - ii. endorse our approach and next steps for taking forward a GSS leadership development/talent management programme;
  - iii. support/champion the immediate actions following the publication of the Future Statistician report; and
  - iv. note the feedback received by the GSS Deputy Heads; one year in.

**Background**

3. The GSS Vision, 'Strength in Numbers', launched in October 2024, set out ambitions for cross-government statistical collaboration, increased impact, and a strengthened professional identity. The Vision is underpinned by four pillars: Coordination, Cooperation and Leadership; Capability and Community; Setting Standards; and Transformation and Innovation. During February we published an update on our progress in implementing the vision alongside our priorities for 2026.

**GSS Vision Progress Update: Achievements and Ongoing Initiatives**

4. Since its first launch there have been significant changes in leadership across the Government Statistical Service. Significant progress continues to be made, however, including through the embedding of the role(s) of Deputy Heads of the GSS which have provided some stability throughout this period.
5. During February, progress against the GSS vision was published to both celebrate what we are doing and to set the priorities for the year ahead. The following paragraphs provide a short summary of this, against the four pillars of the vision.

**Coordination, Cooperation, and Leadership**

6. Significant changes in GSS leadership and governance have been realised, including establishing and embedding the role of the Deputy Heads of GSS, clarifying committee structures, bolstering networks, and promoting system-wide coordination through Theme Leads' annual workplans. Through the Deputy Heads, there has been growing connection between the Board (both the Chair and NEDs) and the wider GSS, including through our board papers, topic/issue-based engagement and Board member visibility at events such as the GSS conference and online community calls. We have also established regular bilaterals with the new ONS permanent secretary.

### Capability and Community

7. The GSS identity and community have been strengthened through refreshed induction, new and active engagement via GSS Community Calls, and ongoing diversity and inclusion initiatives. The GSS-RSS Future Statistician project continues to shape thinking and action, with implementation ramping up following publication of the future statistician report in February.

### Setting Standards

8. The new Code of Practice for Statistics (Code 3.0) is being actively embedded across the GSS with an additional focus on seeking out opportunities to improve coherence. Feedback from HoPs suggests that the new code is embedding well.

### Transformation and Innovation

9. The establishment of GSS Artificial Intelligence (AI) champions and ongoing work towards a GSS-wide dissemination platform are advancing innovation and methodological excellence.
10. As agreed with the Board in December 2025, our three main priorities for 2026 are:
  - i. embrace modern approaches and techniques whilst managing the risks - championing the opportunities AI presents in data processing, automation, and generating deeper insights, while also addressing critical risks such as bias, transparency, and ethical considerations. The GSS needs to embrace learning and experimentation in this space to develop the necessary capability. As a first step, we have established a group of GSS AI champions to drive coordination and momentum;
  - ii. leadership and governance - working closely with the new National Statistician to provide strong and visible GSS leadership to respond to wider changes and challenges across the GSS and the Civil Service in 2026; and
  - iii. future statisticians - taking deliberate action to inspire the next generation of statisticians and establish a clear, sustainable talent pipeline that supports long-term, fulfilling career pathways within the GSS, with a particular focus on senior talent pipelines.
11. The remainder of this paper largely focuses on the last of these and how we aim to inspire and develop the next generation of government statisticians.

### **Leadership Development/talent management programme**

12. Recent changes across the GSS' most senior roles and limited opportunities for experienced GSS Heads of Professions to reach these most senior positions has brought into sharp relief the need for improvements to GSS talent management.
13. In practice, we recognise a need to systematically identify, nurture, and accelerate the progression of high-potential statisticians from Grade 6/7 to the most Senior Civil Service (SCS) roles. This is with the goal of developing a resilient talent pipeline with the realistic potential for future National Statisticians to be developed from within the GSS, as well as externally.
14. A summary of the programme objectives, structure and timeline is set out below.
15. The proposed programme objectives are as follows:
  - i. Advance leadership skills and professional statistical excellence;
  - ii. Expand diversity and numbers of candidates for senior roles;
  - iii. Foster a culture of inclusion, collaboration, and global engagement; and
  - iv. Build a sustainable pipeline of statistical talent for future leadership.
16. To achieve this, we propose a combination of the following approach, some of which are free and easy to delivery, whilst others may require more time and/or funding:

- i. **Learning Pathways:** Targeted modules covering strategic leadership, change management, ethical decision-making, technical innovation, and policy impact;
  - ii. **Mentoring and Sponsorship:** Pairing participants with senior GSS leaders and alumni National Statisticians, offering guidance and career support;
  - iii. **Cross-Departmental Placements:** Facilitated exchanges to broaden experience and foster interdepartmental understanding;
  - iv. **International and Academic Secondments:** Opportunities for placements with global statistical bodies (e.g., UN, Eurostat) and academic institutions to enhance perspective and expertise;
  - v. **Professional Accreditation:** Collaboration with RSS for structured Continuing Professional Development and recognition; and
  - vi. **Cohort-Based Action Learning Sets:** Groups tackling real-world challenges, developing practical solutions, and sharing best practice.
17. In addition to all the necessary statistical leadership skills and experience there is, of course, also a need to ensure suitable experience and exposure in the areas of policy, strategy, communication, programme governance, finance and commercial. This is where alignment with other cabinet office led leadership programmes, such as the Future Leaders Scheme and Senior Leaders Scheme would be of significant benefit.
18. As a minimum, we will need the commitment of the National Statistician's Office and the Heads of Profession community to help administer the more basic steps of talent identification, and structured involvement in existing leadership opportunities – such as GSS and Analytical Function task and finish groups. For the more developed aspects, such as increasing access to targeted leadership training and senior statistical development, this may require funding and resources which are yet to be determined. That said, we believe there are significant benefits in starting small and working out the more advanced options as we progress.
19. With that desire to make rapid progress we propose a timeline for a pilot as follows. We would then look to refine the scheme with the new National Statistician's input, pending more formal launch in the second half of 2026:
- i. Q1 2026: Curriculum development, partnership agreements, and Programme Board establishment;
  - ii. Q2 2026: Pilot launch with targeted recruitment, initial modules and mentorship matching;
  - iii. Q4 2026: Full rollout following evaluation, including expanded placements and secondments; and
  - iv. Ongoing: Annual review, adaptive management, and regular participant feedback.
20. As with any programme, we will want to ensure suitable governance and risk management. To achieve this, we will first utilise our People Advisory Group and will then seek to maintain progress with the support of representatives from across the GSS, the Authority, Cabinet Office, and RSS. Our immediate next steps are to:
- i. finalise curriculum and partnerships; confirm Programme Board membership;
  - ii. identify and recruit pilot cohort; launch pilot learning and placement activities;
  - iii. establish metrics dashboard for monitoring progress and feedback mechanisms; and
  - iv. ensure alignment with GSS Vision priorities and broader civil service leadership goals.

### **Future Statistician Report**

21. The Future Statistician vision, co-developed with RSS, calls for government statisticians to be trusted, tech-enabled public analysts adept at producing timely, reproducible, ethical statistics and leading innovation in a fast-evolving landscape. This work clearly related to our proposals for the development of our staff and our management of the talent pipeline.

22. This vision is grounded in the principles of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value, as set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics, with the future statistician requiring a mix of current skills and strengths combined with an evolution to add and develop additional skills which embrace new and emerging approaches to communication and analysis. This embraces the proposal for the leadership development and talent management programme.

23. Key Recommendations:

- i. **Technology and AI Readiness:** Equip statisticians with training in data science, artificial intelligence, and emerging analytical tools to future-proof capabilities. The GSS and the RSS will collaborate to provide appropriate training programmes; and the creation of the GSS AI Champions Group and the Analysis Function group on AI will both play a key role in delivering this recommendation;
- ii. **Professional Identity and Competency Frameworks:** Clarify professional standards and frameworks to guide career progression and define excellence. With the GSS People Advisory Group planning to review the GSS competency framework in 2026, this provides a timely opportunity for the GSS and RSS to work together and ensure this reflects on the needs of the future statistician;
- iii. **Structured Career Progression:** Develop learning pathways, CPD offers, and mentorship to support professional growth from entry to leadership roles. The GSS and the RSS will develop a programme and framework of continuing professional development to support each career stage of government statisticians; aligned with the work GSS People Advisory Group, and within this, the GSS Learning and Development group, are doing to review bespoke learning developed by departments;
- iv. **Integration Across Government Functions:** Promote statisticians' roles across departments, championing multi-disciplinary collaboration and broader impact. There is a role here for Heads of Profession to share examples of good practice to ensure that government statistical teams are set up in a manner that supports close working between with policy, communications, operational delivery, digital and technology teams; and
- v. **Truth Against Misinformation:** Empower statisticians as arbiters of truth, developing communication strategies and resources to counter misinformation and build public trust. The GSS and the RSS, alongside the Office for Statistics Regulation, will support developing the skills and channels to do this.

24. Immediate Next Steps (February–June 2026):

- i. publish and cascade the Future Statistician report across GSS and partner departments: [RSS - The Future Statistician: our joint vision with the GSS](#);
- ii. host community calls and workshops to facilitate understanding and uptake among statisticians;
- iii. review and update competency frameworks via the GSS People Advisory Group.
- iv. develop a joint continuous professional development (CPD) and accreditation offer with RSS to support ongoing professional development;
- v. initiate departmental engagements and identify champions for implementation; and
- vi. establish a RSS/GSS governance structure with annual reporting and evaluation mechanisms, with first progress update due January 2027.

### **Deputy Heads of the GSS reflections**

25. Having recently reached the one-year point in our tenure as joint Deputy Heads of the GSS we ran a short engagement survey with Heads of Profession to reflect on what we are doing well and what we could be doing differently/more. On the positives, HoPs cited stability, visible leadership, passion, structured engagement, and strong communications as major achievements. Also, collaboration and demonstrable progress between meetings with a greater presence from across the GSS (with the GSS feeling less ONS-

centric). Improvement areas included a suggestion for clearer prioritisation and bolder messaging with increased focus on AI and alternative community engagement formats. The response also praised and encouraged us to maintain our energy, to continue to promote collaboration and to ensure early engagement with the new National Statistician to ensure readiness for emerging priorities.

### **Next Steps and Actions: Integrated Plan for the Next Six Months**

26. We are making positive steps towards implementation of the GSS Vision. As such, our priorities are to:

- i. continue GSS Vision implementation, with targeted actions across all pillars, focusing especially on strategic leadership for AI, governance, and inspiring the next generation of statisticians;
- ii. launch the leadership development programme, finalising curriculum, partnerships, recruiting pilot cohorts, and monitoring progress;
- iii. facilitate cascade and engagement with the Future Statistician report, updating frameworks and CPD offers;
- iv. address Deputy Heads survey feedback, clarify priorities, enhance AI focus, and trial new engagement formats; and
- v. monitor, evaluate, and adapt using metrics dashboards, participant surveys, and annual reporting.

### **Conclusion and Board Recommendations**

27. The GSS continues to make substantial progress in realising its Vision, advancing professional standards, and strengthening leadership. The Leadership Development Programme and Future Statistician initiatives are strategic investments in our community's future, and lessons from the Deputy Heads survey provide clear direction for improvement. Board endorsement is requested for the outlined actions, championing the leadership programme, advancing Future Statistician engagement, and prioritising integrated progress across the Vision.

**Jason Bradbury, Jane Naylor, Steve Ellerd-Elliott, Deputy Heads of the GSS, February 2026**

***Economic Statistics Plan Update, February 2026***

**Purpose**

1. This paper provides an update on progress of the Economic Statistics Plan (ESP).

**Recommendations**

2. Members of Authority Board are invited to:
  - i. note the decision to establish work to implement International Macroeconomic Statistical Standards (IMSS) as a programme and the update on business planning;
  - ii. note the current delivery position, including progress, key challenges and the underlying drivers; and
  - iii. note the feedback from the Office for Statistics Regulation on the December progress update, the plans in place for further updates in April and July and our plans to incorporate Key Performance Indicators in the April update.

**Background**

3. The ONS economic statistics plan, [Restoring confidence, improving quality: The plan for ONS economic statistics](#), was published on 26 June 2025 alongside the Devereux Review and [Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan](#) (SIEP).
4. ESP represents an ambitious series of change which is highly integrated with areas across ONS including several elements of the SIEP and methodology and technology improvements.

**Work to strengthen the delivery model for ESP and agree a realistic programme of future work through business planning**

5. The delivery model for ESP continues to evolve as we strengthen assurance, oversight, planning and evaluation to increase delivery predictability. The appointment of Megan Cooper as Director of Economic Statistics Improvement (ESI) establishes a clear senior lead for delivery and assurance, working closely with the incoming ONS Director of Strategy and Change on dependencies on people and technology.
6. ONS Business planning processes underway will strengthen ESP delivery, enabling clear sequencing, assurance on support from enabling functions, updated milestones and improved performance measures, while allowing scope for timing changes in response to stakeholder needs and clearer understanding of cost, capacity and risk.
7. Recognising the volume of essential activity exceeds available capacity across SES and the wider ONS, we have agreed several criteria to aid prioritisation:
  - i. we will protect BAU production of the portfolio of critical economic statistics agreed by ExCo by making sure it is resourced sustainably;
  - ii. drawing on the existing survey and statistics plans, we will work to improve the quality of economic statistics, focusing first on those statistics where quality matters most. In doing so we will draw on a new Tiering framework for surveys and statistics;
  - iii. we will work to implement the core of the new international macroeconomic statistical standards by 2030/31, focusing first on those that are most relevant and material to UK GDP and trade;
  - iv. we will invest in people, technology and processes to reduce risks and improve the efficiency and the quality of survey operations and statistics production;
  - v. we will protect TLFS, Statistical Business Register and IMSS programmes by seeking to sequence work that competes with them; and

- vi. to manage both delivery risk and stakeholder expectations we will create a 'waiting room' for important, but not urgent, improvement work that we will not start work on until we are further progressed with existing initiatives.
8. To strengthen assurance and ensure ESP and SIEP delivery can be tracked effectively, we are developing a coherent set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to enable effective monitoring & evaluation and integrated with corporate reporting. In the short term, we will draw on existing Integrated Portfolio Report (IPR) metrics to provide immediate visibility of operational activity—such as number of errors, number of corrections, achieved sample size relative to target, sample response rate, stakeholder sentiment and other directorate level indicators—while recognising these only partially reflect intended ESP outcomes. We will, over the next four–six weeks, set out a clear plan of action and implementation, including how KPIs will be embedded across new and existing workstreams.-level indicators—while recognising these only partially reflect intended ESP outcomes.
  9. When ONS business planning concludes ESP and SIEP will be integrated into a single recovery plan for economic statistics. As previously discussed with Board, the recovery plan will comprise of a mix of initiatives: continuous improvement, projects and programmes. In line with teal book principles, our approach puts in place governance and controls on specific initiatives that are proportionate to their complexity, risk and importance. The ESP steering group recently agreed to establish work to implement International Macroeconomic Statistical Standards as a programme, reflecting its complexity and importance. It will therefore join TLFS and Business survey transformation as programmes sitting under the ESP.
  10. An audit of ESP governance and delivery—sponsored by James Benford—is underway. Acknowledging the ongoing work to implement improvements the audit will be a baseline review reflecting the current known gaps and planned improvements. The Audit report will be presented to ARAC in May, and we will maintain our partnership to strengthen assurance. Audit colleagues will join the ESP steering group and undertake an ongoing series of periodic health checks to support delivery.

#### Progress to date

11. Current milestone status is: **11 Complete, 19 Green, 14 Amber, 5 Red** Current analysis shows strong confidence in delivering most milestones by March 2026 and replanning underway or complete for others.
12. Completed milestones since the last update to Board include publication of the first official mid2025 population estimates alongside updated migration methods for longterm migration statistics, realisation of the Public Sector Local Government Nonfinancial Account System benefits through implementation into ANA25, incorporation of the full suite of improved foreign direct investment data into the Balance of Payments (Pink Book 2025), increased field interviewer capacity for LFS waves two–five from April 2025, and a 'go' decision to incorporate scanner data into consumer prices - a step change in the quality and way we measure inflation, representing a significant milestone for ESP-2025 population estimates alongside updated migration methods for long-term migration statistics, realisation of the Public Sector Local Government Non-Financial Account System benefits through implementation into ANA25, incorporation of the full suite of improved foreign direct investment data into the Balance of Payments (Pink Book 2025), increased field interviewer capacity for LFS waves 2–5 from April 2025, and a 'go' decision to incorporate scanner data into consumer prices
13. Good progress has also been made on the shaping and delivery of International Macroeconomic Statistical Standards (IMSS), where, in response to the GSS wide Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) consultation the first UK SIC classification was issued for review in line with agreed timescales. We are making good progress on the

development of an integrated plan enabling updated and aligned roadmaps and establishing IMSS as ONS programme will further, to improve organisation wide visibility, accountability and coherence

14. Ongoing resourcing activity to support delivery of ESP continues to make good progress with circa 90percent of ESP posts filled or in live recruitment. The remainder are expected to progress in line with the wider ONS business planning
15. Red milestones reflect high complexity in SBR adoption, ASHE transformation, and the trade in goods methodology review, compounded in some cases by later than planned resourcing. Back to green actions include aligning cross-office plans for SBR and ASHE, supported by additional Digital Services resource to accelerate path for delivery. A deep dive into SBR to identify any additional priority actions is underway with recommendations expected to be presented to ExCo in early March.
16. The core population statistics current red milestone reflects the need for more intensive engagement around developing new fertility assumptions. More broadly, some population statistics milestones were originally developed on the basis that a census would not be delivered. With that assumption now changed, the objectives, methods and sequencing of work require reconsideration, resulting in a strategic reset. A structured assessment against decision criteria has confirmed that ONS is not ready to move to new headline population methods in 2026, so the current milestone will not be met. Rather than a short-term delay, ONS is stepping back to review its overall approach, consequently, population statistics milestones will need to be revised. Reflecting this, 3 milestones for population statistics are currently flagged as “not reported” but will be flagged as Red from the next reporting period.
17. Delivery of ESP is highly dependent on Digital Services (DS) and demand for DS resource across ONS outstrips supply posing a significant delivery risk. The most imminent contention is between supporting the Census 2027 test and the Integrated Annual Business Survey (IABS) project, vital to the IMSS programme. Business planning has highlighted there are more areas of concern likely to come to the fore. ExCo is working through how this can be managed to address areas of pressure, including by exploring options to ease the flow of resources into DS.

#### **Plans for future progress updates and stakeholder engagement**

18. Stakeholder engagement remains key. The first quarterly ESP/SIEP update, published in December, provided a comprehensive overview of ONS wide and ESP specific activity. In [their response to the December publication](#) the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) set out 3 recommendations for areas of incremental improvement to be addressed through the next 2 quarterly reviews.
19. The November ESP External Steering Group was well received, with constructive feedback focused on horizon risks, strategic delivery, and transparency. HMT indicated they would welcome a discussion on survey mandation, and the OBR initiated work with the ONS to improve coherence across different producers of local government finance statistics. The steering group also informed the prioritisation of the boost for the living cost and food survey. The next steering group, planned for March, will update stakeholders on delivery progress, our emerging priorities from business planning and our plans for our April publication
20. The next ESP quarterly update, to be published mid-April, will present a single integrated view of priorities, impacts and measures for recovery, reflecting the outcome of ONS business planning. It will outline high level plans, ahead of a fuller refresh in July. In line with OSR’s recommendations it will set include information on planned quality reviews, resourcing and legacy systems and aim to be succinct and user focussed including setting out a first set of agreed KPIs. Authority Board will be asked to approve the April update at the March meeting, and we will engage the OSR ahead of that meeting.

## **Conclusion**

21. ESP continues to make good delivery progress alongside continued improvements in recruitment and the establishment of International Macroeconomic Statistical Standards (IMSS) as a dedicated ONS programme, strengthening visibility and accountability across economic statistics
22. We must acknowledge our risks around high-complexity areas such as SBR adoption, ASHE transformation, and the significant resource contention—particularly pressures in enabling areas and competing demands from the Census 2027 test and business survey transformation. These challenges underline the essential need to sequence work through business planning, including placing some activity into the ‘waiting room’ to maintain predictability and protect critical outputs.
23. Engagement with the Office for Statistics Regulation and external stakeholders remains positive and constructive, informing prioritisation and transparency. The April quarterly update will provide a single, integrated view of priorities, impacts and recovery measures, including the first phase of KPIs, offering clearer insight to users and enabling the Board to monitor progress effectively.

**Lisa Evans, Economic Statistics Improvement (ESI), 12 February 2026**

**Update on the Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan: February 2026****Purpose**

1. Updates to the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) on progress made against the commitments set out in the Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan (SIEP).

**Recommendations**

2. Members of the Board are invited to:
  - i. note the progress made across business and social surveys;
  - ii. for business surveys, note the actions we are taking to understand and improve non-response; and
  - iii. for business surveys, endorse the approach to the treatment of large businesses facing enforcement action.

**Background**

3. The externally published SIEP outlines activities to restore confidence in our survey operations, enhance data quality, modernise our systems and methods and enhance respondent engagement, for both business and social surveys. After March 2026, the SIEP will be fully integrated into the Economic Statistics Plan (ESP), with remaining actions embedded within ESP governance and delivery. For business surveys work will continue to deliver the ambitions set out in the Business Survey Strategy (BSS) and for social surveys work will transition from a short-term recovery plan into the Social Survey Strategy (reported separately), providing a longer-term vision and roadmap for a sustainable, high-quality social survey system aligned to ESP priorities. This IEP update focuses on the Business Surveys side of SIEP.

**Discussion****Business Surveys**

4. For Business Surveys there are 31 actions outlined in the SIEP:
  - i. ten are complete;
  - ii. eight are reporting green, delivery is highly likely;
  - iii. five are amber, delivery is feasible but with significant challenges; and
  - iv. eight are red, delivery appears unachievable.
5. Key updates from across business surveys:
  - i. Progress continues on the **Statistical Business Register (SBR)**, with sampling functionality nearly complete. However, to transition surveys to the SBR, integration with other systems is needed to avoid manual workarounds. Digital Services have contracted a third-party to assess the integration requirements, particularly to support International-Macro Statistical Standards (IMSS) timelines. Adoption of the new SIC2026 classification depends on mapping to the existing structure, while additional resources are supporting the ingestion of expanded business datasets;
  - ii. The **Integrated Annual Business Survey (IABS)** project, also vital to the IMSS work, has exposed limitations in the current Survey Data Collection Platform, prompting an eight-week discovery to assess technical feasibility and recommend future capability. Subject to project board sign off we intend to proceed with a transformed ABS for March 2027 with future integration in the subsequent years once capability has been built. The ability of Digital Services (DS) to deliver IABS capability and the Census Test is in doubt, a paper describing the options and

impacts will be discussed by the Executive Committee resulting in a decision on how to proceed; and

- iii. **Legacy systems** remain a risk to delivery of the IEP, and support from DS is essential. Competing demands across projects coupled with the existing delivery model means resources are limited. Prioritisation during business planning could mitigate this risk and DS are also conducting an internal capability maturity assessment, encompassing existing and potential self-service capabilities, to support the acceleration of the delivery of the long-term transition plan.

#### Business survey non-response and enforcement approach for large businesses

6. The Statistics of Trade Act 1947 (the act) gives Office for National Statistics (ONS) the legal authority to require information from businesses. Enforcement action is taken when a business does not respond to three periods of a monthly survey, two periods of a quarterly survey, or one annual survey. In 2025, ~1,800 cases were referred to enforcement, ~70 per cent of which were large businesses.
7. Non-response reduces data quality and is often driven by lack of understanding, poor survey experience, or survey overload. The BSS aims to improve respondent experience and data quality by better understanding these causes, improving education on the value of data, and strengthening partnerships to boost engagement and response, reducing the need for enforcement.
8. Recent engagement with business groups reinforced the need to improve education and engagement. Small businesses told us they need clearer information on why they are asked for data, how it informs national statistics and policy, and simpler explanations of the legislation.
9. The Large Cases Unit (LCU) and Account Management Unit (AMU) work closely with big businesses, that take part in several surveys. Account managers provide personalised support, by understanding their needs and managing everything together, they ask fewer questions and get better, more accurate answers. Technology constraints limit the pace at which we can expand this model, but we are exploring automation and innovative solutions to reduce manual workarounds and speed up processing.
10. The Business Surveys Directorate (BSD) have been reviewing our approach to enforcement, to streamline our internal processes and develop a new framework to prioritise cases.
11. We propose to use the LCU/AMU model as an alternative to enforcement for large businesses, aiming to boost engagement and understand barriers to completion. Testing this approach with four businesses has been largely successful, with one returning all surveys immediately. We will now use candidate lists and cross-checks to identify cases earlier, focusing next on major retailers, to establish a robust policy. Enforcement will only follow if businesses still fail to engage.
12. Whilst this approach is biased towards the larger businesses, this is outweighed by their contributions to survey outputs and an improvement to data quality.
13. In reviewing our approach to enforcement, we have also developed a 'Critical to Quality' framework to facilitate proportionate treatment of cases across business size and survey. Whilst large businesses will still be key to outputs, we will purposefully focus on other businesses who may be significant in their sector or survey. The framework will be informed through consultation with business areas and methodology to ensure representativeness.
14. Enforcement processes have also been updated to provide efficiencies by looking holistically across businesses. For early avoidance, businesses will be notified on the full extent of their non-response, to prompt the business to resolve their obligations in one action.

## Social Surveys

15. For Social Surveys there are 21 actions outlined in the SIEP. As of submission of this paper:
  - i. four are complete and seven are reporting green;
  - ii. one is reporting green/amber and a further three are amber;
  - iii. four are amber / red. Three relate to Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) and are reported separately and the fourth relates to the Interview Recognition scheme;
  - iv. one is red. This is related to a missed milestone data for International Passenger Survey (IPS) methods improvements; and
  - v. one has not yet started. This relates to the research programme for Artificial Intelligence (AI) work and will be planned as part of business planning for Financial Year 2026/27.
16. Key updates from across Social Surveys:
  - i. **TLFS** – Further to recent discussions with board members, the programme is now engaging with stakeholders to refine the messaging in the next quarterly transformation update (in March/April). There is a jointly held view on the value of publishing further information on the progress and plans to July 2026;
  - ii. **sustainable growth of the field community** remains a key risk. The ONS Executive Committee (ExCo) have agreed a revised headcount of 875, with a stretch target of 915, by the end of FY2025/26, in parallel to exploration of interventions including more flexible contracts, resuming permanent Civil Service recruitment, and higher use of Telephone Operations;
  - iii. the **Interviewer Recognition project** now understands the limitations of current management information systems and is proposing an alternative design to work within these while remaining fair and equitable. Risks persist with this project for implementation within time, cost or quality constraints;
  - iv. **processing and delivery of Living Costs and Food (LCF) data** has moved to a new reproducible analytical pipeline (RAP). Implementation marks a significant milestone in removal of legacy systems and will benefit a number of critical ONS outputs including prices, national accounts, and household resilience;
  - v. Phase One of the **Trust Project** has now been published externally and a marketing agency has been contracted for the next phase, which will focus on young adults (aged 18-34). This aims to identify barriers to participation in ONS surveys and to develop improved marketing and engagement strategies for survey involvement; and
  - vi. following an initial conversation with ExCo in December, a paper presenting feasibility and practicalities of **mandation of surveys** has been shared with ExCo.

## **Conclusion**

17. Within Business Surveys, ten actions have been completed. Several milestones need to be reviewed to reflect justified and targeted adjustments to delivery sequencing and to reflect office prioritisation. We are actively working through the milestones related to SBR and ASHE with stakeholders and enabling partners to re-baseline and establish a route to green. Business Surveys have developed a new policy for the treatment of large businesses who are facing enforcement action, utilising the AMU and LCU programme to support businesses with survey completion to improve their experience and data quality.
18. Within Social Surveys, four milestones have now been completed, and good progress has been made on several others including launch of improved processing for LCF. Detailed review of some actions, including the IR project, are underway and separate updates on mandation and the Social Survey Strategy will be presented to the Board.

**Kate Davies, Director, Business Surveys Directorate, Alex Lambert, Director, Social Surveys Directorate, February 2026**

**ONS Social Survey Strategy: Scoping Paper****Purpose**

1. To present the Board with the proposed scope for the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Social Survey Strategy, recently endorsed by the ONS Executive Committee (ExCo(26)11).

**Recommendations**

2. Members of the Board are invited to review the proposed scope of the strategy and provide any feedback.

**Background**

3. Surveys remain central to the production of ONS's most important outputs, which will continue to rely on survey data for the foreseeable future. The resulting economic indicators and official statistics are among the nation's most critical, affecting every citizen and underpinning the government's economic management of the UK's £2.5 trillion economy.
4. Despite their critical importance, ONS has faced significant challenges in maintaining the quality and reliability of its survey data. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated long-term trends in declining response rates as societal behaviours and public engagement have evolved, and confidentiality and security concerns have grown. These external challenges were compounded by a prolonged period of disinvestment in the core survey operation within ONS, reflecting an organisational strategy at the time to replace surveys with alternative data sources and expand its analytical portfolio during a period of tight financial controls. This past decision impacted the organisation's ability to maintain and grow interviewer numbers, replace legacy systems, and assess and update survey designs to meet user requirements.
5. While ONS initially planned to publish a long-term Survey Strategy in 2024/25, shifting priorities and increased external scrutiny – including systemic reviews and parliamentary oversight – led to a change in approach. The draft strategy was instead repurposed into a timebound recovery plan for 2025/26, the Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan for Economic Statistics (SIEP), to address immediate survey challenges and respond to the Office for Statistics Regulation's (OSR) requirement to stabilise social survey operations. The SIEP has delivered early progress and laid the groundwork for recovery, with stabilisation achieved for the Labour Force Survey (LFS) but not yet across all social surveys; the system is therefore not fully recovered. Recovery is defined as a short-term stabilisation phase that brings the system out of crisis and restores the ability to meet existing user needs.
6. Consolidating recovery is rightly the immediate priority and a necessary step towards building a more sustainable system. However, this is also the right time to articulate a long-term vision – one that embraces uncertainty, recognises the scale of change required, and enables ONS to sustainably evolve its social survey system, flexing survey topics to meet users' changing needs in a rapidly evolving data landscape.

**Discussion**

7. The strategy will comprise two parts: a long-term vision and a strategic roadmap centred on survey system recovery:
  - i. a five-to-ten-year vision that sets out the strategic direction towards achieving a sustainable survey system in a postcensus environment. It will describe the long-term

end state and address a series of fundamental questions (of which will be discussed at an upcoming Strategic Design Committee), for example:

- a) What is the future role of ONS social surveys?
  - b) Should ONS social surveys be mandatory?  
*Note: a 10-month project is underway to develop an evidence-based report with a set of recommendations.*
  - c) What role should ONS play in survey data collection?
  - d) Should ONS deliver surveys on behalf of other Government departments?
  - e) What does an integrated survey design with administrative data look like?
- ii. a three-year roadmap aligned with current spending review period (up to March 2029) representing the first phase of delivery on the longer-term vision rather than the point at which the sustainable system is fully realised. Key priorities are already clear, including completion of Transformed-Labour Force Survey (TLFS), Phase 1, launching TLFS Phase 2 with LFS decommissioning, and progressing wider survey sustainability research. The roadmap will serve as a refresh of the 2025/26 SIEP.
8. The long-term vision (funding for which will need to be built into future business planning) will help to define what a sustainable end-to-end social survey system looks like grounded in current and emerging user needs. These needs will set clear quality requirements, which in turn, will drive the approach across:
    - i. **Data Quality:** exploring ways in which to increase representativeness in our survey data;
    - ii. **Statistical Design:** how we build flexibility and adaptability to meet the evolving needs of our users – integrating alternative data sources and a move towards an integrated survey design approach;
    - iii. **Operational Delivery:** how we best deliver high-quality social surveys - what is the optimum delivery design and model;
    - iv. **Technology:** one that can adapt to advances in artificial intelligence; and
    - v. **People:** the required future capabilities of our staff to deliver high-quality surveys.
  9. Focus areas will span across all aspects of survey capability outlined in the Generic Statistical Business Process Model framework. This includes statistical design, data collection and processing. Technology (including opportunities for artificial intelligence) and people capability will also be core areas of focus. Addressing significant, long-standing under-investment in technology will be essential and will require close alignment with Census colleagues to maximise reuse, interoperability and value.
  10. In scope are all surveys of households and individuals owned by ONS, irrespective of owning Directorate or whether delivery is in-house or via external partners. Out of scope are business surveys, the 2031 Census itself, and post-Census coverage surveys. It will, however, ensure alignment and coherence with the development and delivery of the 2031 Census and future population and characteristics system.
  11. The development will be firmly grounded in ONS's new mission and will serve as a key enabler for the delivery of new strategic objectives and outcomes. This embeds the strategy within ONS's overall vision, rather than treating it as a standalone initiative, while maintaining alignment with broader organisational strategies and dependencies.

#### Approach, Governance and Planned Engagement

12. To guide progressive development, the strategy will adopt a maturity model framework, starting with a simple five-step approach:
  - i. **Analysis:** validate insights from stakeholder, user and staff engagement conducted for the 2024/25 draft ONS Survey Strategy to confirm the strategic context, evolving user needs, and key challenges/opportunities;
  - ii. **Vision:** develop an articulate and compelling picture of the future;

- iii. **Design:** define the steps required to achieve the vision, including a high-level blueprint;
  - iv. **Plan:** align the vision and design with ONS's mission, strategic objectives and outcomes, as well as the Spending Review outcome, and develop a strategic roadmap that details specific activities and work packages; and
  - v. **Deliver:** ensure effective implementation and governance of agreed activities.
13. New ONS senior leadership, Heads of Government Analytical Professions, and Departmental Directors of Analysis will be consulted to provide assurance. The views and insights of several survey experts from academia and the international statistical system will also be sought, complementing existing experts from the Methodological Assurance Review Panel. The OSR will also be engaged to provide external regulatory challenge and insight to support confidence.
14. ExCo will formally approve the strategy with Social Surveys Directorate responsible for progress reporting through established governance structures.

#### Timeline

15. The strategy will be developed in line with the following timeline in 2026:
- i. Quarter 1: agree the scope of the strategy;
  - ii. Quarter 1 and 2: stakeholder engagement;
  - iii. Quarter 2: draft strategy development;
  - iv. Quarter 2: external assurance and approval; and
  - v. Annually: review and refresh as required.

#### **Conclusion**

16. This paper outlines a draft scope and approach for a refreshed ONS Social Survey Strategy. It asks members of the Board to provide feedback on the scope, highlight any gaps or areas that may have been overlooked.

**Alex Lambert, Director of Social Surveys, Jennet Woolford, Director of Public Policy Analysis and Ian O'Sullivan, Deputy Director of Survey Strategy, Research and Innovation, 26 February 2026**