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**Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation**

William Wragg MP  
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

21 January 2022

Dear Mr Wragg,

I write in response to the Committee's call for evidence for the inquiry '*Coronavirus Act 2020: two years on*'; specifically, the transparency surrounding the use of data in decision-making relating to the renewal of the Coronavirus Act 2020.

During the pandemic, the response of statistics producers to publish close to real-time data was remarkable – for example, daily updates on COVID-19 cases and deaths. Producers demonstrated the ability to consider user needs when balancing timeliness against quality and strong analytical collaboration resulted in valuable, high-quality statistics.

As noted in our written evidence to your inquiry on *data transparency and accountability: COVID-19*<sup>1</sup>, throughout the pandemic the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) has called for greater transparency of data related to COVID-19. In May 2020 we set out our expectations on the use of management information by government and other official bodies<sup>2</sup>, and followed up in November 2020<sup>3</sup> and July 2021<sup>4</sup>.

As you know, unfortunately we had to intervene on multiple occasions regarding instances of data being quoted publicly that were not in the public domain, which had been used to inform decision-making. These ranged from data quoted during press briefings<sup>5</sup>, testing data<sup>6</sup>, and data to inform quarantine policy around red-list countries<sup>7</sup>. These were key

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<sup>1</sup> <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/submission/uk-statistics-authority-and-office-for-statistics-regulation-written-evidence-for-the-public-administration-and-constitutional-affairs-committee-inquiry-on-data-transparency-and-accountability-covid/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/covid-19-production-and-use-of-management-information-by-government-and-other-official-bodies/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/osr-statement-regarding-transparency-of-data-related-to-covid-19/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/osr-statement-on-data-transparency-and-the-role-of-heads-of-profession-for-statistics/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/office-for-statistics-regulation-calls-for-uk-governments-to-provide-more-transparency-around-covid-data/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/sir-david-norgrove-response-to-matt-hancock-regarding-the-governments-covid-19-testing-data/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/mary-gregory-to-johanna-hutchinson-statistics-informing-quarantine-requirements-for-arrivals-to-england/>

decisions and announcements made with evidence that the public, media, and Parliament should have been able to scrutinise immediately.

However, two years on, we can see that progress has been made to support the quick publication of new statistics and data which inform decision-making. It is encouraging that, when we have raised concerns with producers recently, often during challenging circumstances such as the emergence of new variants<sup>8</sup>, these have been resolved more quickly. We discussed the overall improvements in our October 2021 report: '*improving health and social care statistics: lessons learned*'<sup>9</sup> where we noted how essential transparency is for building public trust in statistics and retaining public confidence in government decisions.

Transparency has been a big theme of our work. In October 2021<sup>10</sup> we published a blog setting out our own priorities: build our evidence base of good examples of transparency, continue to intervene when necessary, and work with external organisation and governments to make the case for transparency. We are grateful for the Committee's support on these issues, and we will continue to keep you updated on this work.

I hope this is a useful summary for the Committee, and please do let me know if I can be of further assistance.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson

Director General for Regulation

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<sup>8</sup> <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/ed-humpherson-to-victoria-obudulu-data-to-support-statement-made-by-secretary-of-state-for-health-and-social-care/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/improving-health-and-social-care-statistics-lessons-learned-from-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/transparency-open-communication/>