
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

Clive Betts MP
Chair, Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

17 November 2022

Dear Mr Betts,

I write in response to the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee's inquiry into *Funding for Levelling Up*.

The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) is the independent regulatory arm of the UK Statistics Authority and provides independent regulation of all official statistics produced in the UK. We aim to enhance public confidence in the trustworthiness, quality and value of statistics produced by government through setting, and assessing compliance with, the Code of Practice for Statistics¹.

Like the Committee, we strongly advocate for the transparency of data that are in the public interest and required for key decisions underpinning policy making. Our expectations are outlined in our guidance on intelligent transparency². We would like to see greater clarity and transparency around the data that are required to understand progress against the UK Government's levelling up policy commitments. This includes both data on funding for levelling up policies and the metrics that will be used to measure the outcomes. Where there are new or existing data of sufficient quality and at the level of granularity users require, we would like to see greater transparency and accessibility of those data.

We are aware that the Committee wrote³ to Neil O' Brien MP, then Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Levelling Up, asking for further information around the various funding programmes for levelling up policies and his response⁴, accompanied by a funding map dataset, was published on the Committee's webpages. As far as we can tell, this has not been published elsewhere. We are aware that the Committee has concerns about the table that was provided, which is limited in terms of its utility, and the guidance needed for a comprehensive interpretation of the figures. There will clearly be interest from the Committee and others in updated versions of this table as the levelling up agenda progresses, and other funds are allocated.

¹ <https://code.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/>

² <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/transparency/#:~:text=Transparency%20and%20clarity%20support%20public,misinterpretation%20of%20statistics%20and%20data.>

³ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/22447/documents/165461/default/>

⁴ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/22802/documents/167591/default/>

We see that there is a case for developing a more publicly accessible version that could sit on gov.uk, rather than a future update coming out again as an annex to a committee letter. This separate publication could then include the necessary additional information required to interpret the data in a more informed manner and be developed to improve its utility for understanding the outcome of bids for different levelling up funding streams, as well as clarity on periodicity and sources of funding. This should be published in an accessible form, in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

We corresponded with Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) from August 2021⁵ to November 2021⁶, asking for greater transparency around data on the Levelling Up Fund and the related 'prioritisation of places model'. This led to a positive outcome and a commitment from DLUHC to the data that inform key decisions available. When the next round of levelling up funding allocations is announced we expect to see published data that is supported by a methodology and links to the source data. This should allow users to recreate the funding model for the allocation of priorities areas and enhance public confidence in the decisions that are being made.

DLUHC has set up the Office for Local Government (Oflog)⁷ which is tasked with bringing together data to understand local government performance in relation to value for money and publishing its conclusions in an annual report. This information could be used to monitor local authorities' performance against aspects levelling up objectives based on the funding that they receive and may add to the case for developing a published levelling up funding series. We also note that the Levelling Up White Paper outlines that "*devolved governments are best placed to deliver certain services like health and education*" – as a result at some point there may be a need to publish transparent information on the performance of these services, in relation to the funds allocated to them.

We understand that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is receiving funding from DLUHC to develop subnational data and has started publishing its subnational data explorer⁸. The data explorer provides helpful explanations and includes a 'data dictionary' that accompanies the supporting dataset. We think the ONS's approach to publishing subnational data could serve as a good example for other departments looking to publish their own data relating to levelling up policies in a transparent and accessible way.

Please let me know if you have any questions or if I can support the Committee further in its inquiry.

Yours sincerely,



Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation

⁵ <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/ed-humpherson-to-sandra-tudor-transparency-of-data-related-to-the-levelling-up-fund-luf-august/>

⁶ <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/ed-humpherson-to-sandra-tudor-transparency-of-data-related-to-the-levelling-up-fund-luf-november/>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/local-government-association-annual-conference-2022-secretary-of-states-speech>

⁸ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/subnationalindicatorsexplorer/2022-01-06>