

**UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY**

**Regulation Committee**

*Minutes*

**Thursday 16 February 2023**

**London Boardroom**

**13:00 – 15:40**

**Members Present**

Sir Robert Chote (Interim Chair)

Richard Dobbs

Ed Humpherson

Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter

**Other Attendees**

Penny Babb (Item 8)

Emily Barrington (Item 6)

Jennifer Lackie (Shadowing)

Marie McGhee (Items 4 and 9)

Helen Miller-Bakewell

Mark Pont

Gail Rankin

**Secretariat**

Lauren Bradley

Sally-Ann Jones

**Apologies**

None

**Declarations of Interest**

None

## **1. Apologies, minutes and matters arising**

- 1.1 Members were welcomed to the meeting and no apologies were received. The minutes of the meeting on 19 December 2022 were agreed, and actions were reviewed.

## **2. Update from the Director General for Regulation**

- 2.1 Ed Humpherson provided an update on regulation activity since the last meeting, highlighting a focus on excess deaths, police recorded crime and recruitment.
- 2.2 OSR had announced Rob Kent-Smith as Deputy Director for Regulation and Elise Baseley as Head of Casework. Regarding recruitment more generally, OSR had published a blog outlining what a day in the life of a regulator looked like and held a well-attended online event to provide advice and guidance around roles within OSR to encourage applications. As a result, the most recent recruitment exercise had featured a very healthy level of applications.
- 2.3 Ed Humpherson had attended a conference in Cambridge on communicating mathematics to the public; and the launch of a report on the role of the civil society by pro bono economics, which included a recommendation that charities should adopt the Code of Practice on a voluntary basis. OSR were in the process of accepting entries for the 2023 Award for Statistical Excellence in Trustworthiness, Quality and Value.
- 2.4 With regard to casework, OSR had received cases concerning the cost of a public sector pay rise, Accident and Emergency statistics in Scotland, teacher pay, excess deaths, the cost of living and the Census. Ed Humpherson had met with Matthew Rycroft, Permanent Secretary for the Home Office (HO), in January to discuss communications of statistics and data. Ed Humpherson and Sir Robert Chote had been invited to the HO's Senior Leadership forum to discuss the importance of transparency. It was noted that the HO would contribute to a round table by OSR on intelligent transparency in operational departments.

## **3. Draft Business Plan 2023/24 and Budget Update**

- 3.1 Ed Humpherson presented the first draft of OSR's 2023/24 business plan, the proposed work programme priorities and budget options for 2023/24. It was noted that OSR's consultation with users in December 2022 had generated a number of responses, with responses highlighting in particular the value of partnerships with other organisations with an interest in the public good of statistics.
- 3.2 Members noted the importance of reviewing the outcomes of priorities from the previous year during the year end summary.
- 3.3 Members supported the proposal to strengthen OSR's specialist economics capability. It was agreed that the proposal would be tabled at the March Authority Board and that the final business plan 2023/24 would be presented to the Regulation Committee in April.

## **4. Scottish Census Draft Assessment Report**

- 4.1 Mark Pont and Marie McGhee updated members on the progress of OSR's assessment report on Scotland's Census.
- 4.2 Members agreed that OSR would continue to engage with users and producers and that the Director General for Regulation would sign off a revised report but would share any significant issues with the Committee ahead of publication.

## **5. Trade Statistics Redesignation**

- 5.1 Mark Pont updated members on the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) progress towards the re-designation of its Trade Statistics as National Statistics (NS). It was noted that while the ONS had transformed the process and were working to address OSR's recommendations, concerns remained around trade asymmetries.
- 5.2 During discussion members noted that some asymmetries were to be expected and that stability in data was key. Members also noted that the margins of error should be better articulated.

5.3 Members agreed that the Committee would consider the status of the ONS's Trade Statistics in due course once further progress had been made.

## **6. Data Linkage**

6.1 Emily Barrington updated members on OSR's work to review the challenges and opportunities for data sharing and linkage in the UK government since the discussion in July 2022.

6.2 Members noted that further transparency was needed around data linkage. There was support for the scenarios-based reporting approach, which could effectively highlight the public good of data sharing and linkage. It was recommended that the scenarios shared should be as grounded in real life situations as possible, so they were recognised and had impact with senior leaders.

6.3 Members agreed that examples of data issues being unblocked would be useful and that a near final report would be presented to the Committee in April ahead of publication in May.

## **7. Sex and Gender**

7.1 Gail Rankin updated members on the current issues being raised with OSR around collecting and reporting on data and statistics about sex, gender and gender identity and presented OSR's proposed work programme.

7.2 Members discussed the need for further clarity around the source and use of data; and noted the need for clearer guidance around the language used. Members requested that OSR develop a document that provided a current position on definitions and guidance.

7.3 Members supported the approach outlined in the paper and agreed that a further update would be provided to the Regulation Committee in April.

## **8. National Statistics Designation Review Update**

8.1 Penny Babb introduced a paper which provided an update on OSR's ongoing project to refresh the NS designation process.

8.2 Members discussed options for the future communication of NS designation and OSR's role, to improve understanding among users of statistics and stakeholders, and to build confidence in official statistics.

8.3 Members endorsed the approach to clarify, rather than replace NS by enhancing the description, 'National Statistics are accredited official statistics' and to adopt the language 'independent review' to be used by the Authority, OSR and statistics producers, in the Code of Practice for Statistics and in future relevant statistical releases. Members also approved a label change of the term 'experimental statistics' to 'official statistics' in development' in the Code. A paper would be provided for the Authority Board in March.

## **9. Excess Deaths**

9.1 Ed Humpherson facilitated a discussion on the ONS' excess deaths measures following a discussion at the Board meeting in January. It was noted that OSR had undertaken a review on excess deaths and had published a position statement to share their views publicly on 13 February.

9.2 Members heard that the ONS had engaged with OSR and that the tone of the ONS' action plan was constructive and informative.

## **10. Horizon Scanning**

10.1 Ed Humpherson facilitated a discussion on Horizon Scanning. It was noted that OSR would engage further with the Bank of England.

10.2 Members discussed key pieces of work that should report to the Committee, including a discussion on inflation and the cost of living and patient waiting times.

## **11. Any Other Business**

- 11.1 Members discussed OSR's plans to research and publish a review on police recorded crime (PRC) statistics and noted that the review should aim to improve the position of PRC statistics. Members agreed that the PRC paper would be presented at the Board meeting in February.
- 11.2 Members also heard that OSR's work to develop a programme of enhanced scrutiny of economic statistics was going well following a discussion in December 2022.
- 11.3 Members thanked Lauren Bradley for her time as Secretariat Lead for the Regulation Committee. The Committee would meet next on Thursday 20 April at 13:00.