

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Minutes

**Thursday 25 January 2024
London Office**

Hybrid Meeting

Members Present

Sir Robert Chote (Chair)
Dr Jacob Abboud
Professor Sir John Aston
Professor Sir Ian Diamond
Ed Humpherson
Sian Jones
Nora Nanayakkara
Professor Dame Carol Propper
Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter
Penny Young

Other Attendees

Robert Bumpstead
Will Laffan (for item 9)
Emma Rourke (for item 9)
Ruth Studley (for item 9)
Tom Taylor
Jennet Woolford (for item 9)

Apologies

Alison Pritchard

1. Apologies

- 1.1. Apologies were noted from Alison Pritchard.

2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1. There were no new declarations of interest.

3. Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings.

- 3.1. The minutes of the previous meeting held on 30 November were agreed.

4. Report from the Authority Chair [SA(24)01]

- 4.1. Non-Executive Directors had met prior to the Board meeting. They had discussed the review of the Authority by Professor Denise Lievesley.
- 4.2. The Chair reported on his recent activities since the Board last met. Sir Robert had an introductory meeting on 16 January with Laura Gilbert and Steffan Jones, Joint Chief Analysts for No 10 and Cabinet Office respectively, who had recently been appointed as the Authority's senior departmental sponsors. The relationship with senior sponsors would be underpinned by criteria for handling any potential issues of conflict.
- 4.3. Correspondence by Sir Robert included a letter to Shaun Bailey MP about claims made by the Shadow Chancellor following the Autumn Statement; and a letter to Alistair Carmichael MP and Stephen Kinnock MP on the asylum backlog.

5. Report from the Chief Executive [SA(24)02]

- 5.1. Sir Ian provided the Board with an overview of activity and issues since the last meeting, highlighting the following:
- i. the finance team continued to manage the year end position in line with the controls in place, with an improved financial position this month;
 - ii. HM Treasury (HMT) had approved the Supplementary Estimate confirming funding for the Future of Population and Migration Statistics Programme and the work on Public Sector Productivity. Due to delays within HMT the funding would not be received until late March. As such, and with the support of HMT, finance were applying for a Contingencies Fund Advance (temporary cash advance);
 - iii. progress of work on data sharing across the UK;
 - iv. ONS had published Crime statistics on 25 January, which had attracted some media attention highlighting that they did not include domestic abuse. ONS would be publishing separate statistics on domestic abuse in the coming weeks; and
 - v. the approach to addressing the recent issue with the Labour Force Survey (LFS) had impacted positively. ONS had announced plans on 12 January about the next release of LFS data in February. The Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) remained the strategic solution to the LFS. Given the challenges with the LFS the quality of social surveys was a key focus of attention for the organisation. Penny Young had met Alex Lambert and team on 11 January to discuss the strategic context for survey response rates, the LFS and dual running with the TLFS.
- 5.2. The Board discussed the recent Post Office Horizon scandal in relation to the role of Boards more generally including the relationship between Executive and Non-Executive Directors; and the role of NEDs in providing oversight challenge and scrutiny. The Authority had a Whistleblowing policy in place, which was reported to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee on an annual basis. Members noted the value of any Board linked directly to the diversity, knowledge and experience of its members. The potential for group think could be avoided by all members evaluating the issues and consequences. With regard to ONS systems it was noted that legacy transformation was a key area of focus as part of the ongoing business planning process.

- 5.3 Members also discussed the communications underpinning the release of Crime Survey statistics earlier in the day, noting the need for clarity to avoid any misunderstanding.

6. Report from the Chair of the Audit Risk and Assurance Committee

- 6.1. The Chair reported on the work of the Audit Risk and Assurance Committee which had last met on 18 January 2024.

- 6.2. The Committee had considered:

- i. the financial position with assurance provided by the finance team on the controls in place to reach a balanced budget at year end;
- ii. an update on the strategic risk profile with a focus on areas of challenge;
- iii. delivery of the Internal Audit Plan 2023/24 with assurance from the Head of Internal Audit that the remainder of the plan would be delivered on time;
- iv. Internal Reports on Statistical Quality, Errors and Corrections and Cloud Technology, which was scheduled for further discussion at the March meeting; and
- v. the External Audit Timetable for year-end financial statements.

7. Report from the Chair of the Regulation Committee

- 7.1 The Chair reported on the work of the Regulation Committee which had last met on 14 December.

- 7.2 The Committee had considered:

- i. the draft Assessment Report of Accident and Emergency Statistics in England and Wales;
- ii. progress of the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) review of Police Recorded Crime;
- iii. OSR's draft business plan;
- iv. planning for the general election including capability and resources;
- v. the transformation of population and migration statistics and OSR's approach to accreditation;
- vi. OSR's Economic Statistics programme of work; and
- vii. the timing of the accreditation of the Transformed Labour Force Survey.

8. Report from the Director General for Regulation [SA(24)03]

- 8.1 Ed Humpherson provided an update on regulation activity. OSR had published its assessment of Profitability of UK Companies and Gross Operating Surplus, which had found many strengths in the statistics, and identified areas for improvement.
- 8.2 The Board heard that OSR had met with a group of philosophers as part of a round table on misinformation. The aims of the round table were to relate philosophical concepts to the work by OSR in the context of an upcoming election.
- 8.3 The review of the Code of Practice for Statistics was ongoing. The call for evidence had received 50 contributions.

9. Future of Population and Migration Statistics [SA(24)04]

- 9.1 Emma Rourke provided an update on progress towards the National Statistician's recommendation to the Board on the future of population and migration statistics. The Authority on the advice of the National Statistician is expected to make a recommendation on the future production of high quality population and migration statistics that serve the public good.
- 9.2 The Board heard that the evidence from the public consultation had showed that users' support for an admin-based system was conditional on demonstrating capabilities through high quality reliable outputs. The sentiment from the consultation was that the evidence produced by ONS to date had not been sufficient to provide assurance that

ONS could move to a purely administrative data system, with concerns around the maturity of the method and availability of sufficient administrative data sources. The proposal for a further two year programme of work would provide the additional time needed to mature the breadth and stability of data flows and outputs.

9.3 A high level overview of the data journey involved in producing population estimates for England and Wales was provided. The Demographic Index being the first step compiling data based on sources from across government. The Statistical Population Dataset - the administrative based census and output from which estimates are derived and the Dynamic Population Method is the estimation framework. It was noted that ONS had already acquired a significant number of data sources and a programme of work, in collaboration with colleagues across government and the private sector, was ongoing to acquire new sources of data. With new datasets ONS would continue to improve the precision and coverage across all different age ranges. Work also was ongoing to replicate disability: and the Cabinet Office had commissioned ONS to undertake a survey on disability.

9.4 Board members discussed the update. The following points were considered in discussion:

- i. progress made to date by ONS in transforming the population and migration statistics for England and Wales. There was more to do to address fundamental concerns around the security of data supply, granularity of data and small area estimates.
- ii. Good working relationships were in place at both a working level and at Permanent Secretary level, such as with HMRC, who had shown a clear commitment to providing ONS with data over the long term.
- iii. Consideration would be given to the potential for legislation during the further programme of work by ONS.
- iv. In this next phase of work ONS would have the opportunity to transform the population data system in government and simultaneously evolve the relationship with the citizen. A significant programme of work would be undertaken on citizen engagement with users.
- v. The decision to implement a population register similar to other countries was beyond the scope of this recommendation, which would be made clear as part of the communications plan.
- vi. The need for objective performance indicators to be agreed in order to provide the Board with the evidence to assess progress.
- vii. With such an ambitious programme of work ONS would need to consider the impact on ONS's resources and delivery of other key areas of work.
- viii. The need for further consideration on the rationale for the proposed two year time period to undertake a further programme of work.

9.5 The Board:

- i. Agreed that the wording of the draft recommendations would be amended to be more precise and circulated to members for comment ahead of the February meeting. Further information would be provided as part of the February Board paper on risks and the current landscape of data inflows and outputs.
- ii. Agreed that ONS would consider further the proposed length of time to undertake the next programme of work and when it should start. Given such an ambitious programme two years may not be sufficient.
- iii. Agreed that a second full public consultation in the next two years was not needed. Assurance was provided on the plans for significant user engagement in the forthcoming two years, given the need to demonstrate to users their concerns have been addressed.
- iv. Agreed the proposal to establish a focussed subcommittee of the Board to monitor and assess progress of a programme of work with clear actions and objectives. It

was acknowledged that the effectiveness of the subcommittee was dependent on the provision of objective performance indicators and precise criteria that would be tracked throughout the programme of work and would form part of the subcommittee Terms of Reference.

- 9.6 The Board noted that it was clear on how the decision would be made, and satisfied that the proposed governance was the right approach. The Board would make the recommendation on the advice of the National Statistician.

10. Any Other Business

- 10.1 The Board would next meet on 29 February.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Agenda

25 January, 11.15 - 14.00

London Boardroom

Chair: Sir Robert Chote

Apologies: Alison Pritchard

Attendees: Emma Rourke (for item 6), Ruth Studley (for item 6)

NED Session: 10.30 - 11.15

1 11.15-11.20 5 mins	Minutes and matters arising from previous meeting Declarations of interest	Meeting of 30 November 2023
2 11.20-11.30 10 mins	Report from the Authority Chair	SA(24)01 Sir Robert Chote
3 11.30-12.00 30 mins	Report from the Chief Executive	SA(24)02 Prof. Sir Ian Diamond
4 12.00-12.10 10 mins	Report from Committee Chair <ul style="list-style-type: none">Audit and Risk Assurance CommitteeRegulation Committee	Oral Update Dr Jacob Abboud Penny Young
5 12.10-12.20 10 mins	Report from the Director General for Regulation	SA(24)03 Ed Humpherson
12.20-12.25 5 mins	Break	
6 12.25-13.55 90 mins	The Future of Population and Migration Statistics	SA(24)04 Emma Rourke Ruth Studley
7 13.55-14.00 5 mins	Any Other Business	

Next meeting: Thursday, 29 February 2024, London Boardroom

Chair's Report, January 2024

Purpose

1. This paper provides the Board with an overview of the Chair's activity in December and January.

Review of recent activities

2. On 6 December and 17 January, I met with Denise Lievesley to discuss the progress of her review. The draft report is currently with the Minister, Baroness Neville-Rolfe, for comment. Its precise publication date is still to be confirmed.
3. On 19 December, I had an introductory meeting with Doug Chalmers, the new chair of the Committee for Standards in Public Life. We discussed his priorities for his new role which included thinking about the impact of Artificial Intelligence.
4. On 11 January, Sir Ian, Emma Rourke and I attended an all-statisticians meeting of the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and its arms-length bodies, hosted by Lucy Vickers, Head of Profession for Statistics at DHSC. We joined a panel alongside presenters from DHSC, the UK Health Security Agency, NHS England and NHS Business Services Authority hearing about the priorities for their respective portfolios, and then took questions from the audience.
5. On 15 January, I met with Stian Westlake, Executive Chair of the Economic and Social Research Council. We discussed upcoming priorities for the Authority, support for independent research institutions and researchers' use of the Integrated Data service and Secure Research Service.
6. On 16 January, I had an introductory meeting with Laura Gilbert and Steffan Jones, joint Chief Analysts for the Cabinet Office, who have recently been appointed as the Authority's senior departmental sponsors. We discussed upcoming priorities for the Authority and where they can support and stay engaged, particularly the Lievesley review and the recommendation on the Future of Population and Migration Statistics.
7. I also held my regular catchups with the National Statistician, Director General for Regulation, Chief of Staff, Deputy Chair, and the Chairs of the Regulation and Audit and Risk Assurance Committees.

Casework and correspondence

8. On 19 December, I responded to Sarah Olney MP regarding the Prime Minister's claims about public sector debt.
9. On 16 January, I responded to Shaun Bailey MP about claims made by the Shadow Chancellor following the Autumn Statement.
10. On 18 January, I responded to Alistair Carmichael MP and Stephen Kinnock MP on the asylum backlog.

Upcoming activities

11. On 2 February, Sir Ian and I will meet Alex Chisholm, Chief Operating Officer for the Civil Service and Permanent Secretary for the Cabinet Office, to conduct the Office for National Statistics mid-year stocktake.

Sir Robert Chote, Chair, 18 January 2024

*Chief Executive's Report, January 2024***Purpose**

1. This provides the Board with an overview of activity for January 2024.

Summary

2. December and January have seen promising progress on navigating both a challenging internal and external environment. Our major **migration release** was well managed in November, receiving positive reaction from media and stakeholders whilst the **Labour Force Survey (LFS)** recovery plan is starting to see some initial success. However, we are now managing the knock-on impact of this prioritisation on wider **social survey response rates** which now pose an issue.
3. Internally, we have begun implementing our new approach to **hybrid working**, with a significant uptick in office attendance at the start of January. Business planning and **prioritisation** is now in full swing, focusing on allocating and setting budgets much earlier than was achieved in this financial year. Several senior **staffing moves** have also been successfully implemented over the last couple of months.
4. We continue to positively engage with the **Denise Lievesley** review of the UK Statistics Authority and have met with Baroness Neville-Rolfe on this topic – this is not now expected to be published any earlier than February. Cross-government engagement also continues on the upcoming **recommendation on the Future of Population and Migration (FPMS)** statistics. This is covered in more detail within the individual Board paper.

Review of recent activities

5. Our final **Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS)** development upgrade went live on the survey in December after significant work. Slightly later than originally planned, we are now finalising analysis on the latest headline labour market data from the new survey which will inform the LFS decommission timetable.
6. In the Data Science Campus (DSC), work is underway with Digital Services and Technology and Social Surveys Transformation to build a Generative Artificial Intelligence model that assists colleagues working in TLFS. It will take free text from the survey input and assign the respondent to a **SIC and SOC code**. Our aim is to improve the accuracy and efficiency of the current classification process.
7. Within **business survey transformation**, key milestones continue to be delivered across the Business Statistics Transformation project (under Ambitious, Radical, Inclusive Economic Statistics towards the delivery of Research & Development statistics phase 2. Prior to Christmas, the Business Enterprise Research and Development (BERD) results system passed a key quality gate and are now progressing towards a publication of the new data early 2024. This is a significant milestone in the development of these key statistics.
8. On **Gross Domestic Product (GDP)**, as part of our response to the recent Office for Statistics Regulation GDP rapid review, we have updated our GDP release day information to include enhancements to the wording in our bulletins and additional detail of data coverage. We published in December an accessible [blog](#) on our approach to uncertainty, replicating our previous recession blog which was well received and we continue to look into presenting uncertainty.

9. In November we published a suite of population and international **migration releases** accompanied by a [blog](#) by Emma Rourke which discussed the main drivers for migration to the UK, why we update our estimates of international migration and the transformation of the population and migration statistical system. We also published the latest research article update into how we are refining and improving methods to produce [Admin-Based Population Estimates \(ABPE\)](#) in December.
10. Our **migration releases** landed smoothly with the focus of heavy media coverage on the numbers themselves and the underpinning behaviours that shaped them. Commentary on the reliability of the ONS data was almost wholly neutral in tone. Communications and Digital Publishing colleagues worked in close collaboration with the migration team to deliver an intensive multi-channel communications plan, including media briefings and one to one sessions for the leading commentators. Our messages were amplified via bespoke, bite-sized content on our social media channels, a video 'explainer', the National Statistician's blog and through the creation of 'white-label' graphs that media outlets included in their coverage.
11. Statistics on **homeless deaths** have seen increased interest over the past couple of weeks. We have received a piece of official correspondence and a parliamentary question tabled by the Shadow Minister for Building Safety and Homelessness on a proposal to cease ONS' Deaths While Homeless publication in the Department for Health and Social Care's consultation on health and social statistical outputs. This correspondence was prompted by an [article](#) published in the Guardian on the topic. This has highlighted the need for us to be proactive and ready in explaining tough prioritisation decisions effectively and at pace.
12. On **excess deaths** methodology, we are working on refining aspects of the methodology and performing further testing ahead of its implementation for all four UK countries. The methodology article is planned for release in February and stakeholders from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, the Department for Health and Social Care and the Devolved Administrators continue to be actively involved.
13. The **Winter Covid Infection Survey questionnaire** ran smoothly over the Christmas period, achieving 80 per cent response rate for the period between Christmas and New Year. The latest results were published by ONS and The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) on 11 January. Questions asking about GP access, on behalf of NHS England have also now been added too.
14. The **Analytical Hub** in collaboration with the DSC have been supporting the Cabinet Office and Government departments in the response to the Israel-Hamas conflict. We have been providing shipping indicators for key critical straits to inform decision making. Separately, we are providing a group of eight ONS analysts who are forming a new **Crisis Surge Team** within the National Situation Centre. They will be available to be loaned at short notice during major incidents and crises to support government's analytical response. They will gain experience of crisis operations, allowing them to apply this to rapid response work in ONS.
15. We have also published [a landmark publication on innovative, timely B2B payments and supply chains data and insights](#), using **interbank payment systems**. This followed the Direct Debits indicators that are published regularly in the Real-Time bulletin, and the significant first publication of [Visa card spending big data insights](#) one month earlier. During December and January, I also met with senior executives from both Visa and Vocalink to discuss the importance of our partnerships.
16. Internationally, the DSC launched the **International Data Masterclass**: an open online course aimed at building data skills in leaders in global governments and the public sector. Launch events took place in Rwanda (National Institute of Statistics Rwanda) and Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service). In the new year we will continue to roll-out the

program to wider users, with continued support from our collaborators: The Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and The United Nations Statistics Division.

17. On 19 January, the ONS Newport office hosted the Welsh Language Commissioner, Efa Gruffudd Jones. She met the National Statistician, the ONS Welsh Language Team, and the new ONS Welsh Language Champion, Ruth Studley. The Welsh Language Commissioner has commended the office for its recently revised Welsh language scheme, and as part of the visit will receive more information about plans for implantation, our Welsh operations, and a tour of the office.
18. We have made good progress at pace on **public sector productivity**. January sees the official launch of the Time Use Survey for Public Sector workers, where we are looking to capture detail on the administrative burden place on key workers. The initial coverage of the survey will be focused on previous respondents to the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) supplemented with additional respondents from the education and justice sectors. The participation element of survey was launched on the 9 of January 2024. Results with associated qualitative research are planned for publication on 1 March 2024 and are expected to feature in Spring Budget.
19. There has also been strong delivery in Prices where in December we published the first quarterly publication of the **Household Costs Indices** (HCIs) which looks at households' experience of inflation. To launch the publication, we organised a set of three webinar sessions to showcase the new quarterly publication and support user understanding of these statistics. The ONS also attended an event on the HCIs led by the Royal Statistical Society and Resolution Foundation, where we presented our recent findings and were part of a panel session of experts. The feedback from the publication and the events has been overwhelmingly positive, with many welcoming our work and highlighting the importance of these statistics.
20. The Analytical Hub, with Cabinet Office and HM Treasury colleagues are developing a "**State of the State**" product, which will present key UK statistics to outline current and past trends across demography, society, the economy, and beyond, and what these might mean for the future. This aims to support Permanent Secretaries and their departments in medium-term thinking, particularly ahead of the next Parliament. This will be part of a wider suite of other horizon scanning work happening in the Cabinet Office (UK in 2024, Systems Challenges) and government departments.
21. On the **environment**, we published a set of five outputs leveraging policy, media and public interest around the United Nations COP28 climate conference, including Census-based analysis of jobs in high emissions industries, OPN data on climate change action and inaction, and the latest UK natural capital accounts – giving full breakdowns for all four nations for the first time.
22. Corporately, we have been engaging with counterparts from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to discuss capability and its associated challenges, successes and aspirations. This will be expanded to joining a people focused working group with ABS, Statistics New Zealand, and Statistics Canada, broadening this strong relationship. We have also been awarded 'Highly Commended' by the Commissioners' Mark of Excellence 2023. Among a wide range of competitive applications from 19 Departments and teams across Government, ONS were ranked second by the panel. Our submission this year focused on our innovation in recruitment and commitment to widening the pool of applicants for civil service jobs.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician, 17 January 2023.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(24)03

Update from the Director General for Regulation

Purpose

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

Discussion

2. Our main areas of focus since the last Board meeting have been:
 - i. Ongoing work:
 - **Election planning:** We submitted a paper to Regulation Committee setting out our approach to managing casework during a potential election spike. The paper also included our plans to support the statistical system. We continue to engage with Full Fact and other regulators in the lead up to the Election;
 - **Sex and Gender:** We have engaged with a range of stakeholders in December and January on our proposed updated guidance on sex and gender. We plan to share the updated guidance with the Regulation Committee and to publish the later in February;
 - **Police recorded Crime Review:** We shared an information draft of our review of Police Recorded Crime Statistics in England and Wales with Regulation Committee in December. We are currently developing our recommendations and are working towards publishing a final report in March; and
 - **Future proofing the Code of Practice for Statistics:** Our call for evidence is now closed with over 50 contributions. We plan to present our early findings to the Regulation Committee in February and update the Board in March, recommending a refresh of the Code to incorporate the feedback from stakeholders in the Code content and its presentation. We will also give recommendations related to the badges for accredited official statistics, official statistics, and official statistics in development, and on the refresh of the voluntary application of the Code scheme.
 - ii. Published work:
 - **Update to ONS transformation of Long-term international migration:** On 7 December we published a [report on progress](#) made by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on the actions outlined in our [review of migration](#) statistics published in March 2022. The update report concludes that nine of OSR's recommendations can now be closed, and it recognises the ambitious and innovative work that ONS is progressing. There are four recommendations that ONS has not yet addressed in full which focus on:
 - a) Plans for the ongoing review of data sources;
 - b) Developing and publishing measures of uncertainty;
 - c) Publishing long-term plans for international migration statistics; and
 - d) Publishing a population and migration transformation road map.
 - **Review of mental health statistics in England:** In December we published a [follow up](#) to our [review of mental health statistics in England in 2019/20](#) in which we summarised the largely positive progress against the findings of our review.
 - **Profitability of UK Companies and Gross Operating Surplus:** Last week we published our assessment of statistics on profitability and surplus. This is the

second assessment we have carried out in our [Spotlight on Quality](#). Our assessment found many strengths in the statistics and identified five requirements to improve the quality of these statistics.

Casework

3. We have received 182 cases so far in 2023/24, including 36 cases since the last meeting 15 of which were opened in January. These cases include concerns around 20 mph speed limits in Wales, The Office for Budget Responsibility forecasts, the housebuilding figures, Ministry of Defence Drone numbers, vaccine safety, knife crime, asylum backlogs, tax cuts and NHS waiting lists.
4. We have closed 29 cases since the last meeting including public interventions on: [20mph speed limit in Wales](#), [Census data on Gender Identity](#), [comments made by the Prime Minister on Debt falling](#) and [withdrawn asylum applications](#).

Wider reach

5. **Conferences and Speaking** engagements: I spoke at a conference for researchers in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, on a panel with Catherine Hutchinson of the Evaluation Task Force. I was also invited to the University of Exeter to deliver a lecture on the public good provided by statistics. I also met with Ivan Murenzi (National Institute of Statistics Rwanda).
6. **Misinformation round table**: I invited a group of philosophers to meet with us to discuss how to proactively and reactively respond to misinformation. The aims of the round table were to relate philosophical concepts like context collapse to the real examples that face OSR in the context of an upcoming election.
7. **Voluntary adoption**: We welcomed Carnegie Trust into the community of Voluntary Adopters of the Code in November for their work on their Life in the UK Index which measures the collective wellbeing of the people of the UK.
8. **OSR priorities**: We published a [news story](#) asking for feedback on areas we should be focusing on in the next 12 months and beyond. We plan to engage with stakeholders to seek their input for our 2020-2025 strategy.

Issues on my mind

9. **Code Review**: With the call for evidence now complete, we now need to draw together our proposals on whether or not to update aspects of the Code.
10. **Election**: One of the main areas of focus for OSR this year is the upcoming election. We have already seen an increase in casework for January, with a focus on government targets and manifesto pledges and we expect this to continue throughout the year. We are working on the actions we highlighted in the Regulation Committee paper to prepare a number of position statements on a range of topics and are trialling a new casework team structure that should enable us to have more flexibility if we receive an increase in cases.
11. **Hybrid**: In line with the rest of the Authority, we introduced minimum 20 per cent office attendance in January, this will increase to 40 per cent in April. Early indications are that people are attending as we would expect, and we will be increasing our in-person collaboration over the coming months.

Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, OSR, 17 January 2024.

Regulatory Activities Dashboard

January 2024

Transport, Environment and Climate Change

Continued engagement to support **Transport for London**, who voluntarily adopt the Code, in embedding practices into its data reporting.
 Assessments: Defra **Butterflies** team has published its latest outputs with improvements made based on our assessment meeting requirements. The **People and Nature Survey (PaNS)** requirements are near completion, we expect to confirm accreditation.
 Casework: Reviewing concerns about Transport for London's Low Traffic Neighbourhoods report and the transparency of data within it. This is part of continued engagement we are having with TfL on intelligent transparency.
 Systemic Review: Exploring options for an OSR piece on **citizen science** at the request of Regulation Committee. **Transport Accessibility** presenting at a Royal Statistical Society

Population and Society

Paper for Regulation Committee, update on ONS's transformation of **population and migration statistics**. Continued engagement with the devolved administrations on **population transformation** plans.
 Assessment: Phase 3 planning underway of **2021 Census**.
 Casework: Responded to letters from Alistair Carmichael MP and Stephen Kinnock MP about the Prime Minister's claim that the asylum backlog has been cleared.
 Systemic Reviews: OSR letter and report to acknowledge ONS' progress on **migration transformation**, set out our view of the current position and our expectations.

Economy, Business and Trade

Reviewing ONS **public sector classification process**, user engagement to understand risks. Developing a version of the framework used for the **Spotlight on Quality** to share with stakeholders.
 Assessment: Report for Spotlight on Quality on the **profitability of UK companies** and **GOS statistics** presented to Regulation Committee meeting.
 Confirmed accreditation of **Business Demography** statistics.
 Casework: Responded to a letter from Shaun Bailey MP on comments made by the Shadow Chancellor on the size of the economy. Also preparing a response to a letter from James Murray MP on government communications surrounding the cut to National Insurance Contributions.
 Rapid Review: Conducting review of **revisions of GDP** and drafting report.

Crime and Security

Systemic Review: Quality of **police recorded crime statistics**: discussing findings and draft recommendations with stakeholders and revising draft report.

Housing, Planning and Local Services

Engaging with **Housing Ombudsman Service** and **UK Housing Review** team to promote working in line with TQV. Keeping a watching brief regarding the potential new **RAAC data** sources across the housing sector in UK.
 Compliance Check: Initiating review of **Scottish Government Scottish Housing Condition Survey** statistics following temporary suspension of accreditation last year. Arranging follow up on **DLUHC Building safety MI**. Held follow up meeting on **Valuation Office Agency Council Tax Stock and Council Tax Challenges and Changes** statistics.

Health and Social Care

Scoping for a discussion of the use of statistics about **health and care inequalities across the UK**.
 Assessment: Published report about **English A&E waiting times statistics**.
 Planning an assessment of statistics about the **Adult Social Care Workforce** in England.
 Casework: Received a letter from the campaign organisation 38 degrees regarding the Department for Health and Social Care's claim that NHS waiting lists in England have reduced.
 Compliance Check: review of new **Winter Coronavirus Infection Study** statistics published by UKHSA and ONS. Planning check of the **Scottish Health Survey statistics**.
 Systemic Reviews: Published report of the follow-up of **England mental health statistics**. Commenced follow-up of **NI mental health statistics**. Planning review of **mental health statistics** in Wales published by the Welsh Government.

Children, Education and Skills

Exploring ways to build relationships with charities to promote the Code and VA.
 Assessments: Collating evidence and considering potential requirements on the **Graduate Outcomes Survey** statistics produced by Jisc (previously HESA).
 Compliance Check: Review of the **Higher Education Student statistics** produced by Jisc to monitor the impact of the data futures transformation (previously HESA).

Labour Market and Welfare

Liaising with ONS after its decision to stop the **Household Financial Statistics Transformation (HFST)** project and what this means for NS confirmation of **ONS's Family Spending** publication.
 Assessments: DWP's **Personal Independence Payment (PIP)** statistics, draft report with the producer team for comment, ahead of Regulation Committee meeting.
 HMRC/ONS **Estimates of employment and earnings** from **PAYE RTI data**. Meeting the producer to discuss progress against their action plan.
 Rapid Reviews: Review ongoing of ONS's and NISRA's **Transformed Labour Force Surveys**

Regulatory Activities Dashboard

January 2024

Research

Continuing **literature review** seeking to further understand and formalise our knowledge of the role statistics play in policy (both policy development and evaluation).
Awarded the contract for our **research project** about the role of statistics in decision making by individuals, which seeks to illuminate hidden ways in which statistics serve the public good.
Stakeholder engagement: Our journal article on statistics that serve the public good has been accepted pending minor revisions by the Statistical Journal of the International Association of Official Statistics – we are amending presently.

Insight

We are in pre-planning stages of the next **State of the Statistical System Report**. We have used feedback from the previous team to improve the process for the next round.
Insight Project based on the theme of **Reducing Outputs** is underway. The project team will collate and disseminate OSR work/guidance on the theme. This initial project will provide a framework for a series of projects on different themes.
Ongoing work on the **Gap Analysis** of the 5 Year Strategy. Engaged with OSR team on evidence at first team business planning event.

Data and Methods

Developing tools to support regulators in their work on **police-recorded crime statistics**, **quarterly GDP estimates** and **monitoring RAAC (Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete)-related parliamentary discussions**. This work is going through the ONS Cyber Security processes to go into production.
Participated in the pre-AI Security Summit workshops hosted by the Royal Society.
Chaired a discussion on Large Language Model (LLM) skills for the cross-government Text Data Subcommunity
Planning underway for the **Data Linkage and Sharing** follow-on report.

Policy & Standards

We completed our event series for the **Code review** with a stakeholder in-person event at the RSS. The call for evidence closes on 11 December. Producers are working on implementing the new language and changes made following the **National Statistics designation review**. We are supporting by speaking at producer sessions and publishing updated guidance including on official statistics in development.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY BOARD

SA(24)04

The Future of Population and Migration Statistics

Purpose

1. This paper supports the discussion of the National Statistician's recommendation to the Authority Board (the Board) on the future of population and migration statistics.

Timing

2. A recommendation is due to be put forward to Government by 31 March 2024, following the public consultation that closed at the end of October 2023.

Recommendations

3. Members of the Board are invited to:
 - i. agree the broad direction for a recommendation set out in this paper, in particular paragraph 59; and note the checkpoints that are in place for the future;
 - ii. discuss any further assurances the Board would like to receive; and
 - iii. agree next steps for the development of the recommendation.

Background

4. The Authority, on the advice of the National Statistician, is expected to make a recommendation on the future production of high-quality population and migration statistics that serve the public good. The recommendation will be informed by the evidence gathered from public consultation, as well as research and expert assurance.
5. This recommendation follows a ten-year programme of work to meet the Government's ambition as set out in 2014 that, "censuses after 2021 will be conducted using other sources of data and providing more timely statistical information."¹ A prototype of an admin-based census will be made available in the Integrated Data Service (IDS) by summer 2024, including Admin Based Population Estimates.
6. A census is more than a simple count of the population, it is the creation of an individual level dataset that includes age and sex and can be broken down to very low geographical areas. This data is used to provide information on the population and society and can be used for multiple purposes. The work that has been conducted to date has demonstrated an administrative based census has been delivered; the detail is described within this paper.
7. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has confidence in the future statistical design and the underlying methods, based on a suite of proofs of concept and plans that address the gaps that remain. Sustainable delivery of a census' key attributes using administrative data is feasible but conditional on a reliable supply of high-quality administrative data from Government and public services. The recommendation is an opportunity to make this dependency unambiguous and solidify our partnership with Government with a focus on delivering a fuller range of admin-based outputs.
8. The recommendation should invite the Government to agree three principal actions:
 - i. to commission the ONS to produce population estimates and other census-type outputs from administrative data, and resource the ONS appropriately to do so;

¹ [Government's response to the National Statistician's recommendation](#), The Rt Hon Francis Maude MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office, 18 July 2014

- ii. to commit to delivering the necessary flow of administrative data required, and to invest in the required improvements to those sources; and
 - iii. to monitor and formally review after two years, assessing the progress made on each of the above towards a sustainable system that meets users' needs.
- 9. Building on the progress to date, over this next period the recommendation would drive a programme of work to deliver a suite of accredited outputs that meet user needs, monitored and assured on an ongoing basis. Supporting and underpinning this will be the natural improvement of those data used in ONS outputs thus benefitting donor organisations directly and broader government indirectly.
- 10. We have listened to our users and learned from our public consultation. The evidence shows that users' support for an admin-based system is contingent on demonstrating capabilities through high quality, reliable outputs. The next two years provides the additional time needed to mature the breadth and stability of our data flows and outputs. This should align with the timing of a natural check point from the re-submission of the business case and allow an understanding of the priorities of any new administration.
- 11. The Board has received regular updates on ONS' programme of research and engagement to inform this recommendation. Most recently, in October 2023 the Board were taken through the ONS's published research and in November 2023 were presented with high-level results from the public consultation. In December 2023, a slide deck was provided to Board members, from whom comments were received and have influenced this paper.
- 12. This paper reflects the feedback and considerations received from: users, via the consultation responses and conversations throughout the consultation period; Methodological Assurance Review Panel (MARP); the National Statistician's Inclusive Data Advisory Committee (NSIDAC); and insight collected via the Census Benefits evaluation project.
 - i. The MARP have provided ongoing advice and assurance to this programme of work including on the statistical methods and design.
 - ii. A fundamental role of the NSIDAC is to provide independent advice and scrutiny of approaches being developed to improve the coverage and quality of data and evidence on inclusivity. They have encouraged us to ensure we place the fundamental principle of inclusive data, 'that everyone in society counts and is counted and no-one is left behind' at the heart of the development of the new statistical model.
 - iii. The interim results from the Census Benefits exercise, based on responses from key stakeholders and data users, indicate financial benefits of using census data, aligning with the same user needs identified in the Public Consultation. Respondents to this exercise outlined administrative data are already being used to complement census data.
- 13. This paper provides detail of the work to date, an outline of the design and methodology, and a summary of the feedback from the consultation. It also provides an indication of the recommendation from the National Statistician to the Board.

Discussion

- 14. This section summarises several topic areas collectively to allow the Board to have a cohesive set of information:
 - i. the strategic vision and progress to date;
 - ii. an overview of the production of admin-based population estimates for England and Wales, including migration and characteristics;
 - iii. the cost benefit analysis of an administrative based approach;
 - iv. the proposal to genealogists and social historians;
 - v. an outline of user needs as articulated through the consultation;

- vi. data management, security and privacy; and
- vii. a summary of international approaches.

The strategic vision and progress to date

15. The Future of Population and Migration Statistics programme (FPMS), provides the ONS the opportunity to continue to transform the way in which it produces statistics on the population and society. It builds on the successful transformation of the Census and Data Collection Transformation (CDCTP) in building a framework of evidence for the National Statisticians Recommendation on the future of population and migration statistics and survey transformation.
16. Our ambition is to put evidence in the hands of decision-makers, through our vision to provide more frequent, timely and inclusive statistics about the population and its characteristics. We aim to deliver the following outcomes:
 - i. a social statistics system that shapes our understanding of society and people;
 - ii. a system to create and share statistics that is sustainable and future proof; and
 - iii. a broad flexible range of outputs and products to respond to user needs and questions of the day.
17. We are committed to transforming the way we produce our statistics, building in flexibility to account for changes in data, technology and policy development; underpinned by the integration of the best available data sources. All of this is to ensure that we meet society's needs for more data that is updated more regularly and is flexible enough to adapt quickly to changing needs. To enact this vision, the programme aims to provide users across government, local authorities and the private sector a better understanding of the population, resulting in greater precision in decision making for example financial allocation to service provision and much more.
18. The FPMS outline business case offers a minimal viable product to meet user needs. In summary, it will provide core outputs including the transformed annual population estimates using the admin-based population estimates and transformed migration statistics. In addition, there will be estimates on core characteristics such as disability and ethnicity, transformed household, communal establishments and special population groups and transformed housing statistics.
19. We have built the foundations to enable estimates of lower-level geographies and alternative population definitions, demonstrated through the publication of the Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) estimates. Through FPMS, we will build on this using the technology made available through CDCTP, for example, interactive maps and engagement with users on how they meet their needs as expressed through the consultation. We are establishing collaboration hubs that build and work in concert with the ONS analytical hub, creating further partnership opportunities to strengthen Government statistics to underpin evidence-based policy making to support the governments priorities. Two collaboration hubs have already been prioritised, Welsh Language with the Welsh Government and Undocumented Migrants with Home Office (HO).
20. As the work of FPMS progresses, its research and analysis will provide additional insights which the programme will publish and will test the impact with stakeholders.
21. We have demonstrated our ability to deliver an annual admin-based census and through the CDCTP, proofs of concepts have been developed that evidence our ability to create:
 - i. a comparison of our admin based population estimates with the 2021 Census;
 - ii. proofs of concept demonstrating our ability to produce timelier (2022-based), and progress towards more frequent admin-based population estimates;
 - iii. proofs of concept demonstrating our ability to produce small-area univariate and multivariate statistics for a selection of topics; and

- iv. proofs of concept demonstrating our ability to produce a Census 2021 Data Asset with a rolled forward population at the core.
- 22. In December 2023, we published population estimates using the Dynamic Population Model² and have agreed this method will replace the existing cohort component method used in mid-year estimates from June 2024 onwards. Admin-based population estimates will transition to official statistics in June 2024 while we continue to work with the Office for Statistical Regulation to achieve National Statistics Status.
- 23. As part of the population and migration statistics system, progress on admin-based migration estimates saw the addition of; uncertainty estimates, net migration for those studying, and asylum seekers in 2023. Several methodological improvements were implemented, partly discovered by [research during rebasing](#) population statistics over the intercensal period 2011-2021. As expected, using Census 2021 demonstrated our admin-based migration estimates were more accurate than International Passenger Survey (IPS) based estimates.
- 24. We are using several data sources for our housing and household/communal establishment statistics including the Address Base product (which uses local authority (LA), Ordnance Survey and Royal Mail data), supplemented with other sources, such as Value Office Agency (VOA) and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) data. These provide information about where people live and how they reside together.

Description of admin-based population estimates

- 25. This section provides a high-level overview of the data journey involved in producing population estimates for England and Wales from administrative data, setting out the data and processes required to produce; small area estimates, population breakdowns and multivariate analyses equivalent to those produced following a census. The methodology outlined here has been reviewed by MARP which has provided advice and guidance during the development phase and will continue.
- 26. *Demographic Index (DI)*: The first step in the journey is to compile data based on sources from across government to create a spine that captures anyone that has ever interacted with those administrative data sources. This enables us to capture a high proportion of usual residents and minimises under-coverage (the under representation of distinct groups from across the population). Key data are supplied by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Department for Education (DfE), Jisc, Welsh Government and NHS England which are linked using deterministic and probabilistic methods in the absence of a universal identifier. Using these data, a dataset is created that groups clusters of records that are believed to belong to the same individual and assigns them a single unique ID, but it does not include data on demographics or characteristics. The resulting dataset is extremely large with circa 450 million records associated with circa 120 million unique demographic entry identifiers. Though highly comprehensive, if being used to identify usual residents the dataset suffers from a high degree of over-coverage which relates to either: multiple rows of data associated with a single individual (as a result multiple records across sources, duplication on a source or missed linkage), or records associated with non-residents or people no longer in the population (i.e. those who were usually resident but have emigrated or died).

² Admin-based population estimates - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk)

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/articles/adminbasedpopulationestimates/localauthoritiesinenglandandwalesmid2021tomid2023>

27. The ability to link data sources across government using the DI allows low-level geographic aggregate comparisons between data sets to be made. This allows us to assess potential quality issues in each data set, such as working with NHS to address patient-list inflation. Other data sources include advanced passenger information, P85 tax returns and electoral register data to identify people that have moved overseas. We have developed projects working with selected local authorities to understand how local data sources may be used to enhance our analysis and reduce coverage issues and benchmark our estimates. Using these data and as part of the development, we are evaluating the impact of different inclusion and exclusion rules to improve coverage. To inform coverage adjustment we are investigating admin-based approaches to dual system estimation and spatial modelling approaches using local data sources.
28. *Statistical Population Dataset (SPD)*: This is the admin-based census, and the key output from where we derive the estimates. The SPD groups the clustered records into a single record per person and links a series of key attributes to the DI to provide an identifier, activity indicator, demographic and geographic insight. Based on a series of rules, over-coverage can be reduced by excluding records for which there are no signs of activity, and a place of residence can be assigned to records which have multiple conflicting details (e.g. students who may have multiple addresses). The resulting dataset provides our best individual level dataset to represent usual residents based on admin data alone, it still suffers from over and under coverage and a further coverage adjustment is made to account for this and make best assessment of population size at the local authority level. Compared to the census and census coverage survey, analysis indicates the coverage was within one per cent, with 7.3 per cent incorrectly excluded and 8.6 per cent incorrectly included.
29. Currently this coverage adjustment is based on census results, but alternative means to provide more up to date coverage adjustment are in train. We have developed a partnership with the Chief Digital Data Office (CDDO) to consider how Single Sign On (which expects to have circa 30 million individuals signed up to the service by the end of 2024) might contribute as an input into our coverage adjustment, and in parallel we are pursuing capture-recapture approaches using administrative data complemented by a survey based approach; and the development of trimming methods to attempt to remove over-coverage on the SPD. This process refines the DI from circa 120 million unique demographic records (which is far more than census estimates) to create an aggregate dataset of around circa 59 million records.
30. *Dynamic Population Model (DPM)*: The production of census outputs relies on additional estimation frameworks to respond to over and under enumeration from the data collection. An admin-based census is no different and the DPM is the estimation framework established for that purpose. Though the SPD approximates the usual resident population of England and Wales for each year independently, further refinements are required to produce reliable mid-year estimates (MYE) of populations size which are consistent over time, and coherent with estimates of international migration.
31. To date MYEs have been produced using a cohort component method which takes census data and rolls the numbers forwards adjusting for flows relating to births, deaths, and migration. However, the further in time estimates are made from the census estimates, the more they are known to drift due to biases in internal and international migration estimates. To reduce this effect the DPM has been developed. The DPM is based on the cohort component method but in addition to using flow data, it also can use administrative data sources such as the SPD to update the stocks each year rather than relying only on previous census estimates. The DPM can utilise more than one data source to triangulate final estimates and can account for various levels of uncertainty relating to each data source used. The output from the DPM is a series of aggregate level (i.e. not person level data) Admin Based Population Estimates (ABPE) for England,

Wales, and Local Authorities. Uncertainty intervals are also produced. Quality assessments have shown that the DPM estimates are less likely to drift from actual population numbers in the intercensal period than the MYEs produced by the cohort component method and therefore from June 2024 the DPM will be used to produce official population estimates for England and Wales. Further in the future we aim to also develop the DPM to produce official migration estimates.

32. *Small Area Population Estimates:* The DPM can reliably produce population estimates down to the local authority level by age and sex. Due to the low numbers of people present at smaller geographic areas, such as LSOAs, an alternative approach is required. At present SPD outputs are used, constrained by DPM population totals so that aggregating such small area estimates results in consistent population totals. Alternative approaches to small area estimation, including spatial modelling methods are currently being explored to enable more sources to be incorporated alongside the SPD. The recent Red Team data science exercise (see below) has accelerated our capability to produce these small area population estimates.
33. *Characteristics:* Our research so far has appended information about characteristics such as ethnicity to the SPD to estimate the ethnicity distribution. There are two potential sources of bias that need to be addressed through this approach. The first is bias in the coverage of data on ethnicity (people in the SPD for whom no admin data is available) and the second is bias in the SPD coverage. Continuing to develop methods to account for the first of these is a priority in the next phase of our work and should reduce as the quality and coverage of admin data improves. For the second, we weight the SPD to be consistent with the ABPEs.
34. In addition, we will be creating a Longitudinal Population Dataset (LPD) which will link characteristics to respondents of the 2021 Census and track them over time so that outcomes for different groups could be tracked and multivariate analyses performed. As people are born, die, immigrate or emigrate from the population they will be added to or removed from the LPD. The DPM population estimates will then be used to understand how many people from different groups are missing from the LPD over time so that we can weigh the data and alternative data sources can be explored to address any gaps.
35. To date, other characteristics research has focused on producing proofs of concept for those characteristics for which data are normally provided through a ten yearly census, and on non-census characteristics for which there is high user need e.g., income. Through this work, we have demonstrated the ability to produce outputs at subnational levels, down to LSOA for income, ethnicity and housing (excluding tenure), and at local authority level for addresses. Furthermore, we have also been able to combine income and ethnicity, and ethnicity and housing demonstrating the potential to produce insights across multiple characteristics, as the census does.
36. Good progress has been made identifying data sources against the characteristics. We have identified: sources that contain the data required at an individual level, such as Ministry of Defence (MoD) Service leavers data that can provide veterans data; sources that when combined have the potential to provide individual level data, for example deriving travel to work information by linking occupation data with business address data held on the Statistical Business Register; and opportunities to work collaboratively to develop methodology to create variables derived from census data, for example working with DLUHC and Welsh Government to develop an Index of Multiple Deprivation. Only in cases where it is not possible to provide the same level of coverage or granularity as that achieved through a census will we explore additional or alternative data and methods to derive the data (e.g. using modelling and imputation approaches). We will continue to work with users so that we can best understand and respond to their needs, sequencing the development accordingly. Importantly, we will continue to seek new and better

sources of data and work across government to improve harmonisation and availability of data..

37. A recent 'Red Team' exercise conducted by independent data scientists from across wider government provided additional assurance on the methods and processes undertaken to date. Whilst working separately from the existing ONS staff, the findings have a degree of overlap and similar ideas were initiated. Points were raised by the independent team on approach to linkage, modelling low-level estimates, and potential other alternative methods and data sources. A particular example of how this intervention will be used is to take the findings to test for duplication in the DI. The successful impact of the Red Team approach has provided us with confidence to repeat for other topic areas in the future, as it provides an additional degree of assurance, some fresh challenge and support for the existing expertise within the organisation.
38. *Administrative sources used:* the ONS has acquired a significant number of data sources, which when combined provide excellent coverage of the population of England and Wales. This includes the population from birth (Birth and NHS registration, Child Benefit Payments), school age (National Pupil Databases/School Census, NHS records), older students (further and higher education datasets), to working age and pensioners (NHS records, DWP/HMRC tax and benefits data, Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), Council Tax and Electoral Roll records from LAs). In addition, we have access to HO Borders and Immigration Data, DWP/HMRC and NHS migrant registrations, data on International Students from Jisc/ Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) – providing good coverage of the migrant population. Furthermore, we capture special populations through MoD armed forces and Ministry of Justice prisoner data. Many of these sources, particularly health and education data, provide good information about the characteristics of the population, which has supported our research into statistics on topics such as ethnicity and health.
39. We also have an ongoing programme of work (working in collaboration with colleagues across government and the private sector) to explore and acquire new sources. This includes recently acquired mobile phone data (to support understanding of estimates of the size of the day and night time 24/7 population, travel/mobility and migration statistics); work to acquire HO Advance Passenger Information and HMRC P85 overseas tax returns (migration statistics); and exploring how data from the Government Single Sign On service, which expects to have circa 30 million individuals signed up to the service by the end of 2024, will support the statistics system. We are also working closely with LAs, including Manchester, on alternative data sources they may be aware of that provide local area insight and may help with hard-to-reach populations, such as the homeless and undocumented migrants.
40. In addition to population datasets, we also use a variety of data sources for our housing and household / communal establishment statistics. These include the Address Base product (which uses LA, Ordnance Survey and Royal Mail data), supplemented with other admin sources, such as VOA and DLUHC data. Together the sources provide excellent coverage of residential properties and their attributes. The sources are used in combination with the population datasets described above to produce statistics about where people live and how they reside together. As with the population datasets, we will continue to explore new sources, including the potential of utilities data (gas, electric, water/sewerage) and Financial Conduct Authority mortgage data (tenure statistics).
41. Although the data sources described provide acceptable coverage of the population, there is potential to improve and develop the sources, working in collaboration with other departments and local authorities. As an example, we have a collaboration with DHSC/NHS England, as they review the standards for the collection of protected characteristics via the NHS administrative systems. We will engage with them over their commitment to collect seven categories of sex and gender and how the ONS can obtain

and use this data. Building on this we will engage with other data suppliers to mutually benefit the use of administrative data.

42. Provision of data has had ongoing difficulties and thus to ensure the supply and quality of data we are now taking a different approach. We have engaged with government departments through the Data Growth and Operations directorate and through engagement with Permanent Secretaries of these departments. As part of our engagement for the consultation we wrote to all Permanent Secretaries outlining the data required. In addition, we have agreed an approach to securing future supply at the quality we require, through:
- i. letter from the National Statistician to Permanent Secretaries to:
 - confirm and thank them for their ongoing support in data sharing and to focus on a partnership approach; and
 - to set out timelines and seek collective agreement.
 - ii. engagement with Economic and Domestic Affairs Committee, Cabinet Office to seek to develop a write-around to seek more formal collective agreement on ongoing data sharing of admin data;
 - iii. engagement with Central Digital and Data Office proposing critical datasets that ONS relies on for analytical and statistical purposes, including those needed for FPMS, are added to the Essential Shared Data Asset Framework; and
 - iv. creation of a maturity dashboard that includes key performance indicators for the end-to-end use and supply of admin data.

Cost benefit analysis of admin based approach

43. The FPMS Outline Business Case (OBC) has bid for £55 million for the 2024/25 financial year to further develop this work. As described above, this includes core population and migration statistics, characteristics products based on priority user needs, lower-level geographic data, collaboration with other departments, longitudinal data and additional insights that emerge from our research.
44. The FPMS transformation provides benefits above and beyond those provided by the census. Due to the intangible nature of the benefits, it is not possible to quantify all benefits but where this is possible, we have done so. Where we can quantify the benefits, we believe those benefits are achievable. The OBC estimates that for every one pound spent, £13 of benefits will be realised. In contrast, the CDCTP had a one to £5 cost benefit ratio.
45. In addition to financial benefits, qualitative benefits will also be realised through FPMS. These include increased quality of economic statistics where population statistics are used, a good example of this is Labour Market Statistics.
46. The FPMS programme also offers further benefits in the way of a flatter resource profile than is traditionally seen for a Census. In conducting the 2021 Census for example, at its height the CDCTP programme employed circa 1,150 people in 2021/22 falling to circa 600 people the following year. While most of this change was a result of short-term field work contracts to collect Census data ending, the fall also resulted in significant redeployment of individuals across the organisation and a voluntary early severance scheme.

Genealogists and social historians

47. The ONS is aware of the importance of the secondary-use value of census data to genealogists, social historians and family researchers and the concerns raised by members of these groups should there be no future traditional census. The annual Statistical Population Dataset will form the basis of the proposal to genealogists and social historians. We will continue to engage with them to enrich this for their specific purposes, this will deliver intermittent snapshots based on the Statistical Population

Dataset. For genealogists and family historians we have the potential to create similar annual snapshot datasets that retain the identifiable information securely in a similar manner to historical census returns, that could then be released via the National Archives after a period of 100 years in an identifiable form. The data solutions currently being scoped are based on providing users with a solution like that currently provided as a secondary use of the Census.

48. Moreover, we will develop additional innovative means of capturing citizen generated data. This can have several benefits including augmenting the familial understanding of the data sourced via the administrative data. For example, by creating an interface for the public to enable the inclusion of unique voluntary contributions that would provide future generations with more information about their life and extended family relationships (e.g. upload social media content; videos; documents etc). These snapshots of their life would be retained and made available alongside the administrative data sets in the archive.

An outline of user need

49. We received 706 formal responses to the consultation from a diverse range of stakeholders.. A range of user needs were identified from the FPMS consultation for:

- i. service planning and provision, decision making, policy making, funding bids, planning and infrastructure;
- ii. research, denominators, survey sampling and weighting, trends and change over time; and
- iii. personal use/genealogy/reference.

50. Most of those respondents who were statistical users of the ONS population data, were supportive of the direction of travel to develop the use of administrative data. This support was regardless of whether they stated that the proposal met or partially met their needs. The general sentiment was that the evidence provided by the ONS to date had not been sufficient to provide assurance that we can move to a pure admin data system, with concerns around the maturity of the method and availability of sufficient administrative data sources. There was a user need for more granularity than presented within the proposal in key areas:

- i. The consultation document focused on a proposal with a baseline geographic breakdown of LA level for which we have demonstrated that we can generate population estimates within three per cent of census values using the new admin-based system. Not all users required geographic breakdowns below LA level. For those that do, there was a user need for geography and characteristic information below LA level e.g. LSOA, Output Area (OA), ward level, health geography, postcode, rural/urban. These breakdowns are required for organisations to make informed decisions around service planning and provision e.g. transport, housing developments, cultural support, safeguarding strategies for vulnerable groups, equality opportunities, health and more. The ONS have published evidence for developing admin-based ethnicity statistics at LSOA level.
- ii. Users of characteristic data (e.g. religion, sexual orientation) questioned the availability of administrative sources to provide this data have yet to be identified and that the proposal did not provide assurances around plans being developed for these data. Respondents expressed their user need to understand granular sub-populations, communal establishments, and vulnerable groups. Some respondents raised that census is the only current data source that captures these e.g. children, homeless population, sexual orientation, religion, ethnic group and users. The need to ensure that the ONS place inclusive data at the heart of the development of the new statistical model, was reflected in the letter the National Statistician received from the NSIDAC. The ONS will continue to work with the expert members of the NSIDAC to identify, influence and integrate data sources that will provide the

inclusive data required to meet these user needs around characteristics data and the inclusion of hard-to-reach population groups. This approach will be further bolstered by recent structural move of the Inclusion team to the same area as FPMS.

- iii. As expected, users expressed a need to conduct multivariate analysis which they felt had not been evidenced within the proposal. Their responses highlighted the need for further research into admin-based statistics for a number of protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and associated characteristics, with some users noting that they had a statutory obligation to deliver these to Parliament. This fundamental requirement is being prioritised accordingly.
 - iv. Users communicated data concerns regarding the reliance on administrative data where sufficient sources of data may not be available; the reliance on data sharing across government; the quality to provide robust estimates; and the stability over time if the purpose of collection is changed.
51. Devolved administrations were positive about having more timely and frequent data but not at the expense of data quality, geography or characteristic granularity required for key service delivery and evaluation, to feed into UK wide statistics, population estimates, planning government policy and funding decisions.
52. Harmonisation was raised, with users querying how coherence, comparability and consistency can be assured both across different administrative data sources and between devolved administrations. Including potential scenario of the adoption of different data collection approaches where admin first is not consistent across the UK.
53. At the most senior level, this transformation has been identified as a priority over the coming year for the Inter-Administration Committee (IAC) (the regular meeting of the National Statistician with the Chief Statisticians of each administration), and the forward agenda for that meeting will be shaped around maximising cooperation and harmonisation in this space.
54. This will complement the establishment of a joint Task and Finish group between the ONS, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), National Records of Scotland (NRS), Scottish and Welsh Governments to strengthen information sharing and support UK-coherence as each nation determines the future of its own population, migration and social statistics. One of the initial priorities being taken forward by the Task and Finish group is a UK admin data gaps analysis, which aims to improve our understanding of data availability and quality across the four nations. The Task and Finish group is also facilitating the sharing of methods and technical knowledge across nations to support UK coherence.
55. The benefits relate directly to the use of Census data which align with the uses and user need requirements outlined in responses to the FPMS consultation. The benefits outlined include using Census data to:
- i. inform local authority spending on public health, emergency services, social care, planning and development, housing, education, transport, library services, waste collection and recycling;
 - ii. inform central government policy research and funding allocation; and
 - iii. inform business decisions within private sector e.g. retail, pensions, insurance, market research, advertising.
56. Respondents to the Census 2021 Benefits exercise outlined that administrative data are already used to complement Census data, although there is currently no alternate to Census for some specific characteristics. Ethnicity was cited as an example of data that was unable from administrative data, however within the proof of concept conducted for this proposal we have identified, and used, alternative sources of ethnicity data, which would appear not to be being used more widely. The ONS are currently investigating the

feasibility of producing administrative based estimates for the characteristic's outputs currently available from Census data to continue to meet user needs.

57. The establishment of an ongoing user engagement programme is underway to continue to collect and understand user needs to drive and inform the development of the FPMS. This will build on the engagement activity carried out pre and during the consultation, reaching out to the diverse user community to capture user needs across all sectors (central and local government, academia, business, charities etc). Included within the engagement plan are the continued need to understand (a) the secondary use of census data by genealogists and social historians; and (b) the public acceptability of the proposed model.

Data management, security and privacy

58. The ONS enjoys substantial trust from the general public in its use of data for statistical purposes. In developing its proposals and this recommendation, the ONS has been careful to uphold the highest ethical standards. Our proposals for how we will handle data in future have been subject to robust external assurance, including through the National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee (NSDEC) who have provided advice throughout their development.
59. On the advice of the NSDEC, the ONS has conducted social research on public attitudes to data across several years. This includes views on data linkage and the use of administrative data for statistical purposes.
60. In June 2023, the ONS published a summary of public attitudes, drawing on a range of ONS and external sources between 2014 and 2023. The evidence, which aligns with feedback from privacy group engagement during the consultation period, indicates that:
- i. the public is broadly accepting of data sharing and linkage for statistics, and that this has consistently been the case over the decade; and
 - ii. members of the public increasingly assume that data-sharing and linkage are already widespread practices across government organisations.
61. There remains a risk that more widespread awareness of the ONS's proposals among the general public as they are implemented could precipitate a negative public response to the use of administrative data for statistics. This includes the potential for misinterpretation of the ONS's proposals as the introduction of an administrative population register – which it is not.
62. The existence of an administrative population register with a legislative, mandatory footing would straightforwardly address the challenges of over- and under-coverage in our population estimates and provide a strong underpinning for more complex analysis. Such a register is pivotal in admin-based statistical systems in the Netherlands, Norway and Denmark, but not available in the UK. A decision to implement such a register is beyond the scope of this recommendation, or the Authority, unless the Board wishes to use this opportunity to provide advice to the Government on the statistical benefits of adopting a population register.

Summary of international approaches

63. The international community use a variety of methods for producing population statistics on a continuum between traditional Census data collection methods and use of administrative data through a comprehensive population register. The data landscape in most countries require methods that reflect a hybrid approach between the two, with a shift towards more use of administrative data over the last decade.
64. For example, countries such as Italy and Latvia have moved away from traditional censuses to use their population registers (albeit with incomplete coverage) as the basis, combined with surveys and modelling approaches. Most Scandinavian countries drive

their population statistics using their registers, supplemented with surveys such as those for measuring the Labour Force, where appropriate. Countries who do not have a population register such as New Zealand, Australia, the United States and Canada are supplementing their traditional censuses with increasing usage of administrative data for filling gaps, imputation and replacing questions. New Zealand in particular adopted a hybrid approach for their 2023 Census and are exploring an administrative-first approach to meeting future data needs. However, they have not committed to move away from large scale data collections.

65. We are continuing to share our progress and vision with these countries through regular engagement.

The Recommendation

66. Our recommendation to government has been built on the above factors, allowing us to turn the vision into reality, productionising the research and providing important, timely population estimates to our users. This collective set of information will allow the Board to consider the direction of the recommendation.

67. The recommendation should invite Government to agree three principal actions:

- i. to commission the ONS to produce population estimates and other census-type outputs from administrative data, and resource the ONS appropriately to do so;
- ii. to commit to delivering the robust flow of administrative data required, and to invest in the necessary improvements to those sources; and
- iii. to review after two years, assessing the progress made on each of the above towards a sustainable system that meets users' needs.

68. The recommendation should set detailed expectations under each of the three points above, commissioning demonstrable outputs from ONS, the supply of specific datasets from Government, and criteria for assessing the progress made.

69. The recommendation and the Government's response to it will be public commitments that both the ONS and the Government can be held accountable for. It is expected the Government's response will be subject to Cabinet Committee write-round, and thus carry the full weight of collective agreement. Alignment with the HM Treasury business case process as discussed above will further ensure that the available resources match the ambition of our proposals.

70. Reflecting the relevant legislation and mirroring the current process, a further decision on next steps at the end of the two-year programme should be made by Ministers following a recommendation by the Board, on the advice of the National Statistician.

71. Our readiness to make the present recommendation has been evaluated against three high level principles:

- i. The ONS's plan for the future statistical system is supported by users as meeting their core user needs for statistics about the size and composition of the population of England and Wales, its characteristics and housing stock.
- ii. This statistical system will be flexible and resilient enough to respond at pace to future and emerging user needs, adapting to changes in available data sources; and will be capable of going beyond core needs.
- iii. Methods and approaches are peer-reviewed and compliant with relevant legislative and ethical considerations, and the ONS's plans are accepted by the public, with a business case and programme plan in place to deliver a sustainable statistical system.

Longer-term timeline and governance

72. With a two-year programme of work and clear actions and objectives for both ONS and Government, the recommendation will mark the beginning of a vital phase for the future

of population and migration statistics, and we propose the establishment of a focused sub-committee of the Board to monitor and assess progress.

73. Reflecting that success relies on progress both within Government and the ONS, membership should comprise key senior leaders from across Government, relevant ONS Directors General and Authority non-executive directors, chaired by the deputy chair. If the Board are supportive, a term of reference can be drafted, establishing frequent meetings and a clear line of assurance to the Board. The interaction of the sub-committee timelines and that of any changes to the HMT Business Case timetable including due to potential changes in government will need to be developed, and work in concert. Additionally, a critical liaison will be that with the devolved administrations, where a refreshed IAC will support. This approach should clarify the dependency of success on other government departments.
74. We are waiting for approval from His Majesty's Treasury for the amount asked for to complete the minimal viable product and we expect to receive this approval in January. Due to 2024 expected to be a General Election year, we expect to return to HMT with an extension to the OBC with a similar funding profile for the 2025/26 financial year, followed with a Full Business Case in 2026/27 to allow for a new administration to be in place. These timings need confirmation with HMT as the situation develops. Within the longer-term timeline, we would expect that should a future census need to be commissioned we would expect this to require three-five years.

Conclusion

75. This paper provides the Board with a reminder of the ambition and rationale of the work to support a recommendation on the future of the census, and its conditionality. It describes the methodology that is in place which is continuously reviewed and assured by MARP. The paper also provides information on user need, including additional needs and those that won't yet be met. An indication of the opportunities for genealogists and social historians has been outlined and finally, a summary of internal approaches has been included.
76. The Board are invited to review this information, along with that provided previously to agree the direction and timescales of the recommendation on the future of the Census.

Ruth Studley, Jen Woolford and Nick Taylor, Health, Population and Methods, ONS, 17 January 2024