

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Regulation Committee

Minutes

Thursday 6 February 2025

London Boardroom

11:00-14:00

Members Present

Professor Dame Carol Propper (Chair)

Sir Robert Chote

Ed Humpherson

Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter

Penny Young

Other Attendees

Penny Babb

June Bowman (observing)

Catherine Davies

Job de Roij

Caroline Jones

Claire Mokrysz

Anna Price

Isaac Spring

Vicky Stone

Sarah Whitehead

Observing

Geraldine Kinsella

Rishi Vaidya

Secretariat

Sarah Cobden

Sally Jones

Apologies

None

1. Apologies, Minutes and Matters Arising

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. No apologies were received.
- 1.2 The minutes of the meeting on 7 November 2024 were approved, and actions were reviewed.

2. Update from the Director General for Regulation SA(RC)(25)01

- 2.1 The Director General (DG) for Regulation provided the Committee with an overview of the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) priorities and activities and highlighted some of the key areas of focus since the last meeting.
- 2.2 The Committee heard that OSR had seen positive responses to casework interventions. A case involving the NHS England staff survey had led to commitments for improvement from NHS England; and a case involving elective waiting times in Scotland had led to the development of an innovative approach which set out not just median but also 90th percentile waiting times, which are likely to be more informative to the public. OSR was considering the upcoming Spending Review (SR). OSR had received 178 cases for the year to date. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) had written to OSR to update on progress on meeting the recommendations for developing the GSS gender identity harmonised standard in the gender identity report.
- 2.3 Members discussed the update and noted that OSR's State of the Statistical System Report would help inform the Chair of the Authority's first annual lecture, which was being planned for July. Publication of the report would align with timing of the lecture.
- 2.4 The Committee noted the update and confirmed Accredited Official Statistics status for Adult Social Care Workforce Statistics produced by Skills for Care.

3. Economic and Labour Market Statistics Update SA(RC)(25)02

- 3.1 OSR provided an update on the range of activities relating to the regulation of Economic Statistics, including the Phase 1 report on the review of Economic Statistics produced by the ONS, which was planned to be published in early March; the ONS review of release time for market sensitive releases; and a progress update on the OSR review of the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS).
- 3.2 Members provided comments on OSR's review of Economic Statistics interim report. The following points were raised in discussion:
 - i. ONS had been receptive to the conclusions reached in the report on the review of Economic Statistics;
 - ii. feedback from other survey institutions on response rates should be considered to understand and contextualise the decline in ONS response rates, and assess distinctions between ONS and other survey collectors; and
 - iii. OSR would liaise with ONS Executives to reflect on how the report affected business planning processes.
- 3.3 Members noted the update and approved plans for publication of the report on the review of Economic Statistics produced by the ONS. The OSR review of TLFS would be published ahead of discussion by the Authority Board in March on the TLFS. The Committee agreed the recommendation by OSR for the market sensitive release time to remain at 7am.

4. Northern Ireland Census Phase 3 Assessment Report SA(RC)(25)03

- 4.1 OSR presented an update on the Northern Ireland Census Phase 3 Assessment Report which focussed on assessing Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Authority (NISRA) census outputs and requirements outlined in the Phase 2 Assessment Report.

4.2 Members approved the report, noting that the report was positive, and approved plans to publish the report during the week commencing 10 February 2025.

5. Population Statistics update SA(RC)(25)04

5.1 OSR provided an update on population statistics focused around the FMPS programme and future approach to population statistics in England and Wales. The update highlighted Devolved Government concerns on the need for clarity on the ONS approach. A lack of clarity was impacting on their ability to plan and make decisions in a controlled and strategic way. OSR highlighted coherence concerns and potential risks across the system.

5.2 The following points were raised in discussion:

- i. it was important to know the views of the Devolved Governments;
- ii. the approach to the future of population statistics in England and Wales was not a direct decision for the Devolved Governments, but clearly has a great impact on them, therefore a formal conversation with Chief Statisticians that could be fed into the Board's considerations would be appropriate; and
- iii. it was noted that while OSR generally regulates current outputs, strategic uncertainty surrounding population statistics was beginning to create risk to future outputs.

5.3 Members noted the update. Proposals for options on how OSR should work in future to ensure scrutiny would be developed.

6. OSR Strategy Development SA(RC)(25)05

6.1 OSR provided an update on the OSR Strategy development, plans for spending the budget settlement for 2025/26, and plans for the SR phase 2 which would cover 2026/27 and 2027/28. OSR were engaging with stakeholders to shape the strategy and were due to meet with HM Treasury the following week to discuss detail in the zero-based review element of the SR.

6.2 The Committee heard that there were increased demands on OSR, and expectations had become more systemic, requiring OSR to do different types of work in different levels of detail. This built risk into the system which meant additional investment was required to keep pace with demands.

6.3 The following points were raised in discussion:

- i. all aspects of OSR work were vital;
- ii. prioritisation should be framed as the current position, versus future ambition;
- iii. the ability for producer organisations to self-assess would ease strain on OSR resource and enable more effective risk based prioritisation;
- iv. the Authority should have a consistent way to visualise prioritisation for both ONS and OSR to provide meaningful assessment and transparency;
- v. there had been sustained investment in developing OSR capacity and this had required strategic choices, a SR settlement that hollowed out that capacity might increase output risk;
- vi. the term 'core' activity should be applied flexibly to OSR, as OSR needed to take a view of core statistics beyond ONS, and focus on both a four nations and public good perspective to ensure that the whole system was being compliant with the Code of Practice for Statistics; and
- vii. OSR should also consider things it could deprioritise.

6.4 Members noted the update and supported the proposed approach and timeline.

7. Intelligent Transparency SA(RC)(25)06

7.1 OSR provided an update on intelligent transparency. Following the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) report in May last year OSR had been exploring ways of creating an intelligent transparency report card.

Following a letter from the Chair of the Authority to new Secretaries of State setting out the importance of intelligent transparency, a review would be taking place on progress which would support the decision on report cards. OSR had submitted evidence to the UK Government for Modernisation Committee, to strengthen the ministerial code and embed intelligent transparency as a default approach to communicating statistics.

7.2 The following points were raised in discussion:

- i. PACAC should be made aware of the plans taking place based on recommendations made in May 2024;
- ii. intelligent transparency involved identifying gaps, and whilst using AI can help increase efficiency, some caution should be taken when using artificial intelligence to spot gaps; and
- iii. it was important for OSR to communicate intelligent transparency and the possibility of report cards to Special Advisers to ensure that they were aware of standards.

7.3 The Committee noted the update.

8. Code update and VA Development plans SA(RC)(25)07

8.1 OSR provided an update on the Code of Practice for Statistics (the Code). The consultation for the Code was due to end on 14 February and good engagement had taken place. Members were asked to provide feedback on the development of voluntary application.

8.2 The following points were raised in discussion:

- i. in a financially constrained environment voluntary application should pass stringent tests to assess user need;
- ii. concerns were noted around the policing of the Code, especially in instances of voluntary adoption;
- iii. educating users and producers to ensure compliancy with the Code would be valuable in enhancing understanding of what accreditation means;
- iv. intelligent transparency should apply to the way numbers were framed on public dashboards and data should be communicated in a transparent way in order to hold those numbers to comparison; and
- v. as part of the SR and strategy work OSR should take a view to what official statistics look like from a public good perspective and identify sets of statistics that provided good examples of this.

8.3 Members noted the update.

9. Criminal Court Statistics Quality Review SA(RC)(25)08

9.1 OSR provided an update on the review of Ministry of Justice (MoJ) Criminal Court statistics. The report was positive and found confidence in the quality of the data and processes, recommendations in the report would be implemented by June 2025. KPMG were also carrying out a review of the data and their report would be published the following week, OSR would then publish a final report.

9.2 Members noted the update, agreed the report, and welcomed the cooperation from MoJ and Home Office.

10. Fraud and Computer Misuse Statistics Review update SA(RC)(25)09

10.1 OSR provided an update on the draft report on the review of Fraud and Computer misuse statistics which was due to be published in March. OSR had engaged with City of London Police to understand how data was collected. There were still concerns about the quality of data, but a new system was due to rolled out in 2025 which should address issues and implement some of the recommendations.

10.2 Members noted the updated and agreed the plans for publication of the report, noting it was a good example of the work that OSR were doing.

11. Report on Statistics on Health Inequalities in the UK SA(RC)(25)10

11.1 OSR provided an update on health inequalities. OSR were considering what regulatory work was needed and engaging with producers across the UK to address gaps in health inequality statistics. Recommendations looked at broadening focus on health inequality data and transparency in how Government targets would be measured and what metrics would be used.

11.2 The following points were raised in discussion:

- i. there needed to be an agreement about measures of metrics for health inequality data in order to support planned Government policy;
- ii. it was important to understand that health inequalities were cross cutting and complex and appropriate metrics would depend on the intended use of the metric, and the focus should be on more granular level metrics; and
- iii. an OSR blog setting out ideas and missions was a helpful idea to gradually expand the landscape.

11.3 Members noted the update, a blog by OSR would be produced to develop thinking on the topic, and an updated and revised version of the draft report, exploring issues around granularity and targeted recommendations would be provided at a future meeting.

12. Horizon Scanning

12.1 The DG for Regulation raised the Governments five missions, and assessing the balance of the Committee's work to assess gaps.

13. Any Other Business

13.1 The Committee would next meet on Thursday 20 March 2025.