

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Regulation Committee

Minutes

Thursday 7 November 2024

London Boardroom

13:00-15:45

Members Present

Professor Dame Carol Propper (Chair)

Sir Robert Chote

Ed Humpherson

Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter

Penny Young

Other Attendees

Lucy Davies (Observing)

Caroline Jones (for item 4)

Rob Kent-Smith

Helen Miller-Bakewell

Nicky Pearce

Gail Rankin

Siobhan Tuohy-Smith

Michelle Waters (Observing)

Secretariat

Sarah Cobden

Sally Jones

Fran Wigley-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 19 September were approved and actions were reviewed.

2. Update from the Director General for Regulation SA(RC)(24)42

- 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 casework volumes were beginning to rise following a post-election lull. Consideration was taking place around OSR priorities to ensure balance between routine casework and parliamentary demands and OSR would continue to effectively prioritise, whilst ensuring that statistics served the public good.
- 2.3 The following points were raised in discussion:
 - i. following an intervention from OSR, language used around the 'Gambling with Lives' casework on statistics produced by the Gambling Commission had been updated to refer to 'problem gambling' as opposed to 'gambling addiction';
 - ii. wider debate was ongoing within the data landscape around gambling harms. OSR were completing a compliance review on the Gambling Survey for Great Britain which would highlight to users how gambling statistics should and should not be used for the public good; and
 - iii. delays in the coroner's system meant delays in statistics on drug related deaths, members discussed the potential for a public intervention in the form of a letter from either OSR or the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority (the Authority).
- 2.4 The Committee noted the update.

3. Economic and Labour Market Statistics Update SA(RC)(24)43

- 3.1 OSR provided an update on the range of activities relating to the regulation of Economic Statistics, including the review of Economic Statistics produced by ONS, the economy domain workplan and the review of the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS).
- 3.2 The Committee heard that a light touch review was taking place on ONS UK Trade Statistics, given reaccreditation was being considered and it had been a long time since the last full review, and findings would be presented at the February Committee meeting. The first stage of the systemic review on Economic Statistics produced by the ONS was concluding and OSR would report on emerging findings at the February Committee meeting. Following the ONS request to suspend accreditation the Annual Population Survey (APS) was now labelled as Official Statistics in Development. Some users, including Welsh Government had also requested de-accreditation of their statistics that relied on APS data.
- 3.3 The following points were raised in discussion:
 - i. the language and pitch of the report on the review of Economic Statistics produced by ONS would be important;
 - ii. there was a perceived lack of transparency in what ONS considered core outputs, and there should be more clarity in how priority decisions are taken;
 - iii. the Economic Statistics and Analysis Strategy which had set out priorities for Economic Statistics and where funding had been allocated had stopped and might be a useful vehicle for ONS to address some of the things emerging from the review;
 - iv. the paper produced for the Committee on Economic Statistics was valuable in demonstrating user engagement and transparency, a topic that would be addressed at the Statistical Assembly in January;

- v. OSR should engage with Jonathan Portes as Chair of the Stakeholder Advisory Panel on Labour Market Statistics on the TLFS review; and
 - vi. engagement was being finalised around 7am release times, there were varied stakeholder views on this topic and the matter would be handled carefully by OSR.
- 3.4 Members noted the update and agreed that transparency was a key theme across all topics.

4. Adult Social Care Workforce Statistics Assessment SA(RC)(24)44

- 4.1 OSR presented an update on the draft assessment report of statistics about the workforce employed by adult social services departments in England produced by Skills for Care, a charity operating in the official statistics capacity.
- 4.2 The Committee heard that responsibility for the subset of statistics had transferred from NHS Digital (now NHS England) to Skills for Care in 2021. Skills for Care was named as an official statistics producer in 2023. OSR had now been asked to assess the statistics.
- 4.3 The following points were raised in discussion:
- i. the implications of an official body outsourcing data to a charity. It is the official body that either funds or collects the data that made the statistics official;
 - ii. Skills for Care were one of the early voluntary adopters of the Code, prior to it becoming an official statistics producer, and demonstrated a successful model in becoming a producer of official statistics; and
 - iii. more generally social care statistics covered all of the public sector but only some private sector providers, there were plans to obtain better data from all providers in England.
- 4.4 Members noted the update and plans for publication of the assessment report in November 2024. The Committee agreed that it would be useful to include in the introduction by OSR a reference to the broader context and issues around the availability of data.

5. Performance and Maturity Model 6 Monthly Update SA(RC)(24)45

- 5.1 OSR provided the six-monthly performance and Maturity Model update which set out progress against the 2024/25 business plan and five year strategy, including priorities for the current year and the OSR risk profile.
- 5.2 The Committee heard that following an internal risk deep dive a number of opportunities to take forward had been identified. OSR were focussing on coherence of advice so that communication of statistics by producers was done with maximum impact in embedding intelligent transparency and good practice. OSR were engaging with the Authority on the Spending Review (SR) position and OSR would meet the following week to further develop its vision in line with an SR bid.
- 5.3 The following points were raised in discussion:
- i. if OSR did not have success in the SR there was a risk that high level priorities could be impacted due to resourcing constraints, this could add risk to the system; and
 - ii. communicating the success of OSR was vital in building public trust, key performance indicators were being produced to evidence the continued impact that OSR had.
- 5.4 Members noted the update and their support for the OSR team.

6. Regulatory Model development – Workshop

- 6.1 OSR facilitated a discussion on plans for Regulatory Model development under the OSR 2.0 programme. Members were asked for their views on the development of the

model and the strengths and impact of the current approach, to ensure that OSR was focusing on the right things in the right way.

6.2 The following points were raised in discussion:

- i. OSR should assess itself compared to other regulators, including international bodies;
- ii. OSR should ensure balance between preventing problems versus fixing them;
- iii. a strength of OSR was the collaborative approach to user engagement, the Lievesley review had found that users found OSR understanding and helpful, demonstrating effective regulatory impact; and
- iv. another key strength was the seriousness in the tone of OSR engagement across casework and compliance, this improved acuity of outputs and the likelihood that OSR advice and interventions were acted upon.

6.3 Members were asked for their thoughts on four proposed workstreams. The following points were raised in discussion:

- i. there should be an educational aspect in the workstreams to explain what the regulatory system is, what good looks like, how the UK system compares to other countries, and external factors and constraints;
- ii. there was a strategic question around the scope of the workstreams, and what would have most impact;
- iii. it was important to make communication and engagement a two-way process and to listen to audiences for their views on OSR and the impact its work had; and
- iv. the system should be encouraged to monitor itself and a self-assessment model could work, particularly where government departments were already self-reflective.

6.4 Members approved plans for the Regulatory Model development and an update would be provided at the February Committee meeting.

7. Horizon Scanning

7.1 OSR gave a demonstration of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) horizon scanning tool which had been developed by the Data and Methods team. The tool was used to gather publicly available information that was being talked about in public debate in order to recognise emerging themes.

7.2 Members supported the use of the tool and agreed it was valuable but agreed output from AI should always be thoroughly checked.

8. Any Other Business

8.1 The Committee would next meet on Thursday 6 February 2025.