

# **UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY**

## **Minutes**

**Thursday 27 February 2025  
London Boardroom**

### **Hybrid Meeting**

#### **Members Present**

Sir Robert Chote  
Dr Jacob Abboud  
Peter Barron  
Professor Sir Ian Diamond  
Ed Humpherson  
Professor Dame Carol Propper  
Emma Rourke  
Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter  
Dr Sarah Walsh  
Penny Young

#### **Other Attendees**

June Bowman  
Mary Gregory (for item 8)  
Professor David Hand (for item 9)  
Professor Denise Lievesley (for item 9)  
Mike Keoghan  
Ruth Studley (for item 8))  
Sarah Moore

#### **Secretariat**

Sally Jones

#### **Apologies**

Professor Mairi Spowage  
Tom Taylor

## **1. Apologies**

- 1.1 Apologies were noted from Professor Mairi Spowage and Tom Taylor.

## **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 January were agreed subject to a minor amendment.

## **4. Report from the Authority Chair [SA(25)08]**

- 4.1 Non-Executive Directors had met before the meeting. They had discussed topics including the Future of Population and Migration Statistics (FPMS) and the UK Statistics Assembly.
- 4.2 The Chair welcomed new Non-Executive Director members, Peter Barron and Dr Sarah Walsh to their first meeting. With regard to Board subcommittee membership Peter Barron would join Regulation Committee and Dr Sarah Walsh and Professor Mairi Spowage the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. It was noted that the aim was to commence a recruitment process to replace Professor Sir John Aston.
- 4.3 The Chair reported on his attendance at an event hosted by the National Statistician and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe welcoming the Bureau of the Conference of European Statistics to London for their first meeting of 2025.

## **5. Report from the Chief Executive [SA(25)09]**

- 5.1 Sir Ian provided the Board with an overview of activity and issues since the last meeting, highlighting the following:
- i. the year-end financial position was forecast to be a small under expenditure;
  - ii. the business planning process 2025/26 had focused on the highest priority core outputs and was near completion. Alongside this the finance team were working towards the submission of the second phase of the Spending Review 2025 (SR25);
  - iii. consideration of the ethical and legal issues regarding data sharing for the public good;
  - iv. the work by ONS colleagues to develop a Consumer Prices bulletin;
  - v. progress by ONS to address the long-standing issue of delays to coronial data associated with drug related deaths;
  - vi. progress of the Integrated Data Service and ongoing discussions with the Cabinet Office regarding the National Data Library; and
  - vii. the proactive approach by Communications and Digital Publishing supporting publications that have informed public debate, such as the recent coverage of alcohol related deaths.
- 5.2 Board members discussed the update highlighting that the draft business plan narrative should reflect the challenges and the need to focus resources in key areas. The 2024 People Survey results with regard to leadership and managing change would be a key area of focus for the Executive and had been discussed by the People Committee. Emma Rourke continued to work with the Ministry of Justice and the Department for Health and Social Care on the long-standing issues of delays to coronial data associated with drug related deaths. A pilot was ongoing sharing interim death certificates with ONS.

## **6. Report from the Director General for Regulation [SA(25)10]**

- 6.1 Ed Humpherson provided an update on regulation activity, highlighting the development of OSR's strategy and input into the Spending Review. This provided an opportunity to consider the structure and develop capability through training and

development. With regard to OSR People Survey scores further work was ongoing in areas where the scores had declined.

- 6.2 OSR had published its phase three assessment report of the 2021 Census in Northern Ireland, confirming them accredited official statistics.

## **7. Report from the Chair of Regulation Committee**

- 7.1 The Chair reported on the work of the Regulation Committee which had last met on 6 February 2025.

- 7.2 The Committee had considered:

- i. the phase one draft report of the review of Economic Statistics produced by ONS including plans for its publication;
- ii. ONS's review of release times for market-sensitive economic releases and agreement that it remained at 07.00;
- iii. OSR's regulatory work on the work by ONS on the FPMS;
- iv. the Code of Practice for Statistics consultation, which had closed on 14 February; and
- v. OSR's review of the Transformed Labour Force Survey.

## **8. Future of Population and Migration Statistics [SA(25)11]**

- 8.1 Emma Rourke, Ruth Studley and Mary Gregory introduced a paper which provided an update on the Future of Population and Migration Statistics (FPMS) programme. The paper also set out an outline proposal for the recommendation to seek agreement from ministers to deliver a census in 2031 whilst maintaining the administrative based population statistics development during the intercensal years. It was noted that ONS engagement with Devolved Governments had indicated support for a single integrated data collection system in 2031 to allow UK coherence while retaining the ability for devolved question tailoring as needed.

- 8.2 Board members discussed the outline proposal. The following points were made in discussion:

- i. the proposal reflected the recent feedback provided by users at the first UK Statistics Assembly on 22 January supporting a whole population census in 2031 complemented by administrative data with publications of administrative-based population estimates;
- ii. the need to consider the communications underpinning the publication of the independent report on the UK Statistics Assembly led by Professor David Hand and members of the National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee (NSEUAC), which was scheduled for publication following discussion of the report at this meeting;
- iii. the proposal/recommendation document to consider setting out the external context and challenges faced over the last year, highlighting the value of administrative data and the progress made while also being transparent about the limitations of the FPMS programme's maturity at this point to achieve the granularity and quality of characteristics that users need. The document and associated publication communications should also focus on user need;
- iv. ONS colleagues continued to engage with Department for Science, Innovation and Technology colleagues on its digital agenda and related programmes of interest;
- v. development of the business case for the proposal would be challenging given the complexity of the proposed model. Discussions were ongoing with HM Treasury (HMT) as part of SR25;
- vi. stakeholder engagement by ONS including with privacy groups; and
- vii. the work by ONS learning from international colleagues.

- 8.3 The Board heard that ONS would continue discussions with HMT; a circa six-month taskforce would be convened to set out the critical path for delivery using existing expertise. A new leadership model would be implemented within the Health, Population and Methods group and programme governance would be refreshed.
- 8.4 The Board endorsed the proposed approach that the recommendation document to recommend a census in 2031 and maintain the administrative based population statistics development as part of the population statistics system. The Board noted the decision to call a census is for the government. The draft recommendation document would be provided for the March Board meeting with May as a potential date for publication to allow time for ministerial engagement. The Board agreed to establish a new Board subcommittee to provide assurance, oversight and challenge of delivery. Subcommittee Terms of Reference would be developed in line with the proposed approach.

## **9. UK Statistics Assembly Report [SA(25)12]**

- 9.1 The Chair welcomed Professor David Hand and Professor Denise Lievesley to the meeting and noted thanks to Professor Hand for delivering the UK Statistics Assembly Report so quickly after the event.
- 9.2 Professor Hand outlined the joint iterative approach that had been taken to producing the report, which included colleagues from the National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee, Professor Denise Lievesley and a representative from the Royal Statistical Society.
- 9.3 Professor Lievesley congratulated the Authority on the exemplary preparations for the Assembly. The proof of the success of the Assembly would be if users were of the view that they had been listened to and whether statistical producers felt their work was enhanced and improved. The Assembly had provided the opportunity for engagement with a wide range of stakeholders. The level of engagement by businesses at the Assembly could perhaps have been higher, which was similar to the review itself. The Chair's Annual Lecture would provide the opportunity to inform other producers of the Authority's priorities to avoid any overlaps. A number of other National Statistics Offices had listened into the event and some were considering holding their own. In terms of frequency it was acknowledged that every three years was the right approach as it should not become routine and would align with the spending review cycle.
- 9.4 Board members discussed the report. The following points were made in discussion:
- i. the recommendations from the Assembly would inform the SR25 process;
  - ii. the Authority's response to the report would be transparent, with consideration of areas of responsibility across the UK Statistical system;
  - iii. consideration of the sequencing and timing of the Authority's response alongside the work towards the Chair's first annual lecture in July; and
  - iv. the need for the framework and quality of user engagement to be effective for users as a whole.
- 9.5 Sir Robert and Professor Sir Ian Diamond noted thanks to Professor Lievesley for the review and to Professor David Hand for producing the report. The Board welcomed report on the first UK Statistics Assembly, which would be published in the coming days.

## **10. Any Other Business**

- 10.1 The Board would next meet on Thursday 27 March.

**UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY**  
**Agenda**  
**Thursday 27 February 2025, 11:15-14:00**  
**London Boardroom, Hybrid Meeting**

**Chair:** Sir Robert Chote

**Apologies:** Prof. Mairi Spowage, Tom Taylor

**Attendees:** Mary Gregory (for item 6), Prof. David Hand (for item 7), Prof. Denise Lievesley (for item 7), 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 January 2024
2 11:20-11:30 10 mins	Report from the Authority Chair	SA(25)08 Sir Robert Chote
3 11:30-12:00 30 mins	Report from the Chief Executive	SA(25)09 Prof. Sir Ian Diamond
4 12:00-12:10 10 mins	Report from the Director General for Regulation	SA(25)10 Ed Humpherson
5 12:10-12:15 5 mins	Report from Committee Chair <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regulation Committee</li> </ul>	Oral update Prof. Dame Carol Propper
12:15-12:25 10 mins	Break	
6 12:25-13:10 45 mins	Future of Population and Migration Statistics	SA(25)11 Emma Rourke Ruth Studley Mary Gregory
7 13:10-13:55 45 mins	UK Statistics Assembly Report	SA(25)12 Prof. David Hand Prof. Denise Lievesley Sarah Moore
8 13:55-14:00 5 mins	Any Other Business	

**Next meeting: Thursday 27 March, Newport Boardroom**

## UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(25)08

### *Chair's Report, February 2025*

#### **Purpose**

1. This paper provides the Authority Board with an overview of the Chair's activity in February.

#### **Review of Recent Activities**

2. This month I held introductory meetings with our new Non-Executive Directors ahead of their first Board meeting. As part of their induction programme, Peter, Mairi and Sarah have met members of the senior leadership team and have so far attended briefings on the Future of Population and Migration Statistics and the Integrated Data Service. Their induction will continue over the coming months to help welcome them onto the Board.
3. On 10 February I attended the launch event for the third external review of the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR), a process set out in the OBR's founding legislation which dictates the organisation must be reviewed externally at least once every five years. The review, led by Laura van Geest, former head of the Netherlands Bureau of Economic Policy Analysis, assessed the OBR's performance since 2020. Given my previous role, I was interviewed as part of the process.
4. On 12 February I joined an evening reception hosted by the National Statistician and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe welcoming the Bureau of the Conference of European Statistics to London for their first meeting of 2025. We were joined by Bureau colleagues from Albania, Armenia, Canada, Ireland, Mexico and Uzbekistan as well as members of Eurostat, the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the World Bank.
5. I also held my regular catch-ups with the National Statistician, Director General for Regulation, Deputy Director of Strategy and Policy, Director for Operations, and Committee chairs.

#### **Correspondence**

6. On 14 February I responded to a letter from Kieran Mullan MP on the use of statistics about the proportion of the population with a criminal record or conviction.
7. On 18 February, I responded to a letter from Jeremy Balfour MSP on the Scottish Health and Wellbeing Census.

**Sir Robert Chote, Chair, 18 February 2025**

# UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(25)09

## *Chief Executive's Report, February 2025*

### **Purpose**

1. This provides the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) with an overview of activity since the last Board meeting on 30 January 2025.

### **Summary**

2. I was delighted to host and chair the Conference of European Statistician's Bureau meeting at Central Hall Westminster on 12 and 13 February, welcoming colleagues from key partners across the world, including other National Statistical Institutes and the United Nations (UN). The Bureau was warmly received and facilitated productive conversation about how we can drive innovation in statistics and tackle emerging challenges working together and learning from each other.
3. Mary Gregory, Richard Heys and I gave evidence to Treasury Select Committee, with discussion focusing on labour market statistics, but also covering other social surveys, migration and trade statistics. The Committee have since written to thank us for giving evidence. Going forwards, we will provide the Committee with quarterly written updates on the progress of the Labour Force Survey and Transformed Labour Force Survey.

### **Finance, Planning and Performance**

4. The disaggregation and allocation of organisational budgets is complete. The final stages of our business planning activity will be to complete the last iteration of detailed business area milestones, finalise the wording of our published business plan, and draft financial delegation letters. These actions remain on track for completion before the start of the new financial year.
5. SR25 Phase 2 (2026/27 to 2028/29) activities are on track, including the interim submission to HM Treasury (HMT) by 27 February. We have completed our obligations in respect of the Zero-Based Review (ZBR) component of the HMT commission, with thanks to Jacob Abboud for his work through the ZBR Steering Group. Our interim submission will set out our provisional views from the ZBR, our responses to the other sections of the prescribed HMT templates and an early articulation of our investment bids for the period. We have stressed to HMT that this is an interim and thus provisional submission which will be refined in advance of the final deadline of 10 April.
6. As noted at my appearance before the Treasury Select Committee, the Strategy and Policy Division has commenced work with colleagues across the Office for National Statistics (ONS) examining mandatory household surveys and key issues to focus on if their use is to be considered further. Following their request as part of the spending review process an initial high-level paper outlining the current situation will be circulated to Board Members before being shared with HMT.
7. The Data Use and Access Bill is currently at report stage. Our Legal team have been identifying risks and opportunities and will be meeting with the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) Bill Team to discuss the Bill in the coming weeks. Colleagues have also been engaging with DSIT as they consider next steps regarding an amendment made to the Bill in the House of Lords which would provide the Secretary of State the power to define terms for 'core personal data attributes'.
8. We met with Research Data Scotland to discuss management of Scottish projects within the Research Accreditation Panel (RAP) process, a paper on a proposed way forward which see RAP manage Scottish requests whilst respecting devolution will be taken to the next RAP committee.

9. Planning has commenced for the 2025 Government Statistical Service (GSS) Conference. The co-chairs of the organising committee have been appointed, and volunteers from across the GSS are being sought to lead on specific areas of the conference. The GSS Policy and Coordination Team are also finalising a new two-part Government Statistician Group (GSG) Induction course. Part one – which focuses on the GSS and GSG, the UK statistical system, and the Code - should be completed and ready for roll-out before the end of February. Part-two covers aspects such as innovation, raising concerns, and career journeys and will be ready for use as soon as part one is complete.

### **Economic, Social and Environmental Statistics Group**

10. The Prices project had successful sign-off meetings for two important milestones. Moving the processing of traditional data sources to a new cloud-based system, which will significantly reduce reliance on aged infrastructure and increase the resilience of the consumer prices monthly production round. As well as the implementation of transformed Northern Ireland rents data. These changes will be incorporated into headline consumer price statistics in March 2025.
11. Prices division is currently working with colleagues in Digital Publishing to work up a preview of what a future streamlined Consumer Prices bulletin could look like on a new ONS web platform. The preview will be published on 19 February to enable feedback from users.
12. Economic Statistics Architecture have converted the SNA25 PowerBI analysis tool into a template for other countries to use to aid implementing SNA25/BPM7/GFS. A draft has been distributed with the Office for Economic Cooperation and Development and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and an upcoming meeting will discuss this in more depth. The UK are showcasing the tool at the UNECE Group of Experts on National Accounts (GENA) conference in April and plan to promote and make the tool available at that meeting.
13. In addition to the regular publication of our core economic statistics, this month our quarterly Public Service Productivity data were released on 10 February, with media focus on healthcare productivity measures. UK Measures of National Well-Being dashboard was published on 11 February; we published updated Local Authority level clusters including, for the first time, the statistical nearest neighbours of each local authority in Explore Local Statistics.
14. The Public Services Productivity Review Report is due to be published on 13 March. A showcase hybrid event opened by the National Statistician is scheduled for 2 April to bring together a wide range of external stakeholders. The details of the updated Consumer Price Index “basket” of items for 2025 will be released on 18 March, as part of our annual reweighting, with considerable media interest expected.
15. The Economic Statistics Classifications team, in collaboration with HM Treasury, ran an information session on classifications for approx. 80 Finance Function professionals. from across Government.
16. Activity across the Data Science Campus (DSC) has seen the beginning of work using mobile phone and financial transactions data to model missing data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). It is planned that the work will later be adapted to develop methodology for measuring residential moves. The Director of the DSC, Osama Rahman, attended the “International Symposium on Artificial Intelligence and Data Science for Economic Statistics” in Dubai where he progressed work ONS are leading to collate the Playbook for the Implementation of Data Science and AI in Official Statistics with use cases from UN partners.



## **Health Population and Methods**

17. ONS and Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) met with the coroner's policy team from Ministry of Justice (MoJ) on 5 February to explore ideas for how information on deaths referred to the coroner can be shared with ONS earlier. It was noted that under existing legislation and technology infrastructure, information on the fact of death by age and sex may be easier to obtain earlier, whereas information on reason for referral or suspect cause will be more difficult. Proposals have been shared with DHSC and MoJ for review. The most feasible ideas that require least change and investment are coroners sharing interim death certificates with ONS (as the current Liverpool and Wirral pilot), and National Health Service (NHS) England sharing existing death notification data with ONS weekly. This would be an imperfect solution and ONS will continue to engage with MoJ and DHSC on the wider set of options and seek a formal commitment on the way forward.
18. We are currently negotiating the recommissioning of the Health Insights Survey from NHS England. This is an impactful survey that provides unique insight into how public are accessing healthcare services to inform and support the Health Mission. While it is fully funded (circa 3 million) there are some survey prioritisation issues we are currently working through with DS colleagues internally to ensure we can meet the full requirements of the project.
19. Inward visits organised by our international team this month included the Japanese and Cameroon statistics agencies who came to explore a range of our capabilities and how we work with regional partners. I was also pleased to discuss our proposed international development work with partners in the Caribbean, including stakeholders such as Caribbean Community (CARICOM).
20. The sixth in a series of publications from the Health Insights Survey was published on 30 January. The main findings were a significant increase in the proportion of people describing their practice as 'getting better' over the last 12 months. People in older age groups and those with long-term health conditions were significantly more likely to say the service was 'getting better' compared to the average for the previous wave. Separately the impact of an endometriosis diagnosis on monthly employee pay and employee status was published on 5 February and received good media interest.
21. The Methodological Research Hub have recently published their Administrative Data Quality Question Bank (ADQQB) to help analysts in understanding administrative data quality.
22. In recent weeks I was delighted to give Health Data Research UK's Inaugural Lecture on the application of health data in addressing key challenges facing UK society, as well as present at the UK Wide Evidence and Analysis Steering Board on demographic change.

## **Data Capability Group**

23. Following the outcome of the January Inter Ministerial Group (IMG) Digital meeting, the ONS is working closely with Cabinet Office, DSIT and HM Treasury on their advice and a paper to Ministers about the National Data Library, particularly in regard to on-going uses of the Integrated Data Service (IDS) to support Government Missions.
24. Following an initial meeting with Sheffield City Council, the ONS is working closely to deliver plans for strong IDS use cases that support the Government's missions, including across creative industries, employment and work and future service design.
25. Two Digital Services colleagues have been recognised in the yearly apprentice awards. These awards celebrate the exceptional achievements and dedication of our apprentices and their support networks at ONS.

## **Operations Group**

26. A targeted pilot campaign began in Birmingham on 4 February aimed at boosting survey participation. Materials have been developed in-house by our Communications and Survey Research and Behavioural Insights teams. The campaign uses postcode data to target communications that prompt citizens to respond and overcome any trust barriers, including a postcard, video on demand and outdoor posters. The campaign runs until March and results will be used to inform future survey communications.
27. Proactive activity by Communications and Digital Publishing has supported a number of releases that have informed public debate, including widespread coverage of alcohol-related deaths with the data welcomed by charities, plus positive broadcast, press and stakeholder pick up of the endometriosis analysis. Our new population projection explorer tool was featured in several media articles covering January's projections publication – including in the Independent and the Evening Standard – helping citizens to understand the effect of different factors on population numbers over a long period. Prof Phil Rees CBE, a nationally respected geographer and demographer, said of the tool: "The population projections explorer will be very useful for testing out alternative assumptions using the ONS National Model."
28. Over the past month the ONS have been targeted with 258 phishing campaigns with 910 phishing emails sent to the ONS colleagues. Due to training, education and phishing simulation work undertaken by the Security Culture team the click rate was 0 per cent, which is the first month this has ever been achieved.
29. The Statistical Business Register (SBR) has produced an assets-based sample for use in Financial Surveys for the first time. This is a milestone development for the SBR which utilises newly acquired corporation tax data from HM Revenue and Customs and newly built functionality that enables additional variables (over and above employment and turnover) to be assigned to businesses which improves the quality of our sample supporting the new Financial Services Survey and wider Economic Statistics.

**Professor Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician, 20 February 2025**

*Update from the Director General for Regulation*

**Purpose**

1. This paper provides the UK Statistics Authority 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:
  - viii. **Refreshing the Code of Practice for Statistics:** Our consultation on the Code closed on 14 February. We are reviewing the responses, alongside input from stakeholder sessions that we ran during the consultation period. We have currently received 18 responses as of 10/02 and will be publishing a summary of their views shared in April. We will use this information to develop a final proposal for Code 3.0, which we will share with the Authority Board; and
  - ix. **OSR strategy:** Our plan is to release our multi-year strategy along with the UK Statistics Authority Strategy and seek approval at the June Authority Board meeting for publication in July. We are engaging widely around the strategy, and we are allowing space to hear from as wide a range of stakeholders as possible.
3. We have recently published:
  - i. on 10 February we published our plans for assuring confidence in consumer and household price statistics. There is a significant amount of change in the consumer prices landscape, including improved data on private rents, the move to include scanner data, and the ongoing development of Household Cost Indices. Our statement outlines OSR's plans for these issues;
  - ii. on 11 February we published our phase 3 assessment report of the 2021 Census in Northern Ireland. This report, our third and final report, focused on assessing how well the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's (NISRA) census outputs have met users' needs and revisited the requirements outlined in our phase 2 report in 2021. We confirmed that the 2021 Census statistics in Northern Ireland continue to be produced in compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Our assessment report also included five recommendations for NISRA to address as part of future population work;
  - iii. on 12 February I wrote to Skills for Care confirming that it has met the three requirements outlined in our assessment of statistics about the workforce employed by adult social services departments in England. We could therefore confirm that they comply with the standards of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value (TQV) in the Code of Practice for Statistics and should be labelled accredited official statistics;
  - iv. on 5 February we wrote to Social Security Scotland outlining the findings from our compliance review of its disability payment statistics. These statistics are currently produced as official statistics in development. We outlined some recommendations for it to consider as it further develops these statistics;
  - v. on 29 January I wrote to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) setting out our plans to carry out a review of household total wealth in Great Britain. We previously set out an intention to undertake further regulatory work on response issues impacting household surveys used across the statistics landscape in a blog we published in December last year;
  - vi. as part of our series of blogs examining topics addressed in the proposed refreshed Code of Practice for Statistics, we published a blog by Dr James Tucker from the ONS setting out his thoughts about psychological safety;

- vii. on 17 January we published a guest blog by Sir David Spiegelhalter reflecting on his experiences in the Infected Blood Inquiry and the importance of transparency when faced with statistical uncertainty;
- viii. on 24 January I published a blog on redefining economic progress beyond Gross Domestic Product;
- ix. on 7 February I published a blog on the benefits of data sharing and linkage for getting a better understanding of how to reduce road traffic casualties; and
- x. we have launched the 2026 TQV Award, which we are promoting via a new webpage with a video.

### Casework

- 4. We have three cases outstanding from Parliamentarians, which we expect to respond to in the coming weeks. They cover planning approval numbers in Scotland; the Scottish Health and Wellbeing census for schoolchildren (which may require me to write to the Chief Statistician of the Scottish Government to highlight my concern about a failure to publish the results of an internal review of the process for this census); and comments about the number of working age adults with criminal convictions. Since the last board meeting we wrote privately to the Scottish Government's chronic pain task force, as well as on cases covering Home Office migration data regarding small boat arrivals and MoJ data lab methodology.
- 5. In our most recent public response to casework, we [publicly wrote to SEEN in Health](#) on 28 January regarding the collection of sex and gender identity in the National Health Service England staff survey.

### Engagement

- 6. **External events:** Since the last Board I engaged in a roundtable event with a number of industry and Government leaders, hosted by Sense about Science. The focus for this discussion was to address what good evidence synthesis for policy making looks like and how to ensure this is effectively taken up by Government.

### Issues on my Mind

- 7. **OSR People Survey scores:** We discussed the Authority's overall People Survey scores at the last Board meeting. With the 2024 scores compared with a) last year's OSR scores and b) the Authority as a whole. While the comparison with the Authority as a whole is favourable, there are declines in OSR's scores compared to last year. We are currently undertaking a fuller exercise to explore the drivers of this decline, which I am happy to report to the Regulation Committee or Board in due course.
- 8. **Strategy and Spending Review:** We are looking at developing OSR's strategy and our input into the Spending Review. This will provide an opportunity for building OSR's capability, through training and development. We are also looking into ONS challenges including prices, population, and Labour Force Survey. This will form our wider work around cross-UK comparability, and the State of the System report later this year. Lastly following our recent talks with stakeholders on embedding Intelligent Transparency across Government, including with Special Advisers, we consider that it would be useful to develop guidance on communicating uncertainty and on use of dashboards.

**Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, OSR, 19 February 2025**

***Future of Population and Migration Statistics Update***

**Purpose**

1. This paper provides an update to the UK Statistics Authority (the Board) on the Future of Population and Migration Statistics (FPMS) programme, including a proposal for the future direction of travel and a conceptual outline which would form the basis of a recommendation from the National Statistician.
2. This Board paper sets out the strategy and rationale for the proposal, including feedback from users and stakeholders, such as the UK Statistics Assembly.

**Timing**

3. A decision is pressing, to ensure the ONS can respond to the Spending Review '25 timetable, as well as embarking on the additional workstream required to deliver an integrated census in 2031.

**Recommendations**

4. Members of the Board are invited to:
  - i. agree the draft proposal for a recommendation to seek agreement from ministers to deliver an integrated census in 2031 and maintain the administrative based population statistics development and delivery programme;
  - ii. comment on the associated draft recommendation text;
  - iii. agree the process for the submission of a draft recommendation and supporting paper to the Board in March; and
  - iv. agree the proposed governance to oversee future developments relating to this programme, and the request to comment and agree the Board sub-committee arrangements by correspondence.

**Background**

5. The vision of FPMS highlights the importance of data to create a sustainable and resilient system, using the best available data sources. The heart of the programme has sought to develop towards a new system with administrative data at its core, with the level of maturity achieved being limited by data quality and availability. The objective remains to understand society and people through more frequent and timely statistics to respond to the full range of user needs.
6. Our recommendation for 2031 is for a census that combines the growing power of administrative data with the full coverage provided by a mandatory population survey.
7. The general election and subsequent creation of a new administration has created an opportunity to review the recommendation, responding to the interests of the new government, as key users, and wider feedback, most recently highlighted at the UK Statistics Assembly. The new government has indicated an intention to adopt a position different to the 2014 policy that ONS had previously been operating within.
8. The Spending Review '25 timetable brings forward the FPMS business case refresh. We have not seen the data flows and associated progress required to be able to provide full assurance on the future stability and quality of administrative data, nor are we likely to be at the point at which a decision to undertake a census must be made, to avoid higher delivery costs in 2031.
9. As we continue to maintain the pace and ambition of our greater reliance on administrative data, a census in 2031 responds to user feedback for a comprehensive and inclusive collection, while providing a unique opportunity to learn about the coverage of administrative data to support future methods and outputs.

10. Initial signs from the devolved governments indicate strong support for a single integrated data collection system to allow UK coherence yet retaining the ability for devolved question tailoring as needed.

## **Discussion**

### *Administrative Data – Progress to Date*

11. ONS's programme of transformation has embedded administrative data in UK population statistics.
12. A series of 'big-ticket items' for 2025, built on priorities agreed with the Board last year, will continue the momentum of using administrative data in the population statistics system.
13. ONS has acquired most of the required datasets for FPMS to enable a range of outputs. Whilst we are systematically addressing practical barriers, and have secured Permanent Secretary support, the ownership of the risk of data sharing for FPMS has remained with ONS.
14. . Whilst we have confidence that statistics on many characteristics can be produced using administrative data, others will require a different data collection mode to achieve the granularity and quality that users need.

### *Proposal*

15. Engagement has taken place with wider government stakeholders, including HM Treasury (HMT) and Cabinet Office. Officials indicate support for a census which is inclusive of the whole population and is recognised and trusted by the public, and continuous, high-quality administrative based estimates supporting economic growth and public sector delivery.
16. Feedback from the UK Statistics Assembly provided an important opportunity to listen to users where the desire to have both approaches was made. The three actions taken away from this event include:
  - i. focusing on seldom-heard groups and the need to understand how we can respond to the concerns raised around how admin data can replace/replicate the inclusive data of the census to facilitate intersectional analysis and insights into minority groups at low levels of geography;
  - ii. consider the additional benefit of a census, while continuing to develop an admin first data solution; and
  - iii. ensure citizens are captured in addition to households to better support those who may not have a voice.
17. To provide assurance that the FPMS success criteria and priority user needs can be met, ONS has considered options to supplement administrative data. Following the options analysis, and as outlined above, the recommendation to the Board is to request that the government call a census. This would be an evolution from the 2021 Census, with greater use of administrative data, modern technology and complementary outputs in the intercensal period.
18. The integrated census will enable us to better support those who may not have a voice to be represented in statistics, including a questionnaire for every household, for citizens and for communal establishments in England and Wales in 2031, augmented by administrative data to increase the quality and a range of outputs for priority needs. The survey will be online-first and use new ways of engaging the population using technology.
19. We will combine the benefits of the progress we have seen with use of administrative data and our confidence in its ongoing delivery. A census will provide a benchmark for

administrative data and a unique opportunity to learn lessons about the strengths and weaknesses of administrative data to support improvements to future outputs. These aspects can help build confidence in, and understanding of, administrative data and our methods.

20. A census combined with administrative data also increases the scope of outputs to include topics of high user interest (e.g. income). It also reduces the demand on data collection (e.g. number of rooms data was based on admin data in Census 2021 outputs). We anticipate increased timeliness for key statistics publications following the census.
21. The vision for an integrated census includes the opportunity for a questionnaire for every household, for citizens and for communal establishments in England and Wales in 2031, supplemented by administrative data to support quality and a range of outputs. Our questions will be influenced by the maturity of the administrative data research and the administrative based statistics that we will be producing. It does not commit to censuses beyond 2031.
22. As part of the work to refine the census design, there are innovations to be explored. These need to be tested and refined and will include reduced reliance on field force and paper questionnaires, new ways of engaging the population at an individual level using modern technology and the greater use of community groups to increase public trust and engagement. These factors have the greatest impact on census costs, and while any reduction in nudging may have quality implications, these can be minimised through robust community engagement, greater use of admin data and more targeted use of field force or other modes of collection (e.g. via call centres).
23. It is recognised that there may be difficult choices to be made in the funding of such a 'gold standard'; this proposal is aimed at meeting evolving user needs and keeping pace with the changes across UK society.

#### Governance

24. Work is underway to cost this option as an additional requirement to the remit of ONS. HMT officials are aware of this, and initial costs will be provided to meet the early April deadline for the Spending Review '25. It is anticipated that costs will continue to evolve and be refined as testing progresses, and therefore the submission in April will be of a range of costs, covering 25/26 until post 2031. The approach to conducting this work will be to start with the costs of Census 2021 and make some sensible assumptions on the different aspects of this, recognising those components which are out of date or that will need modernising or cost adjusting. Combining the cost of a census with the needs of administrative data will give us a whole population statistics system view. All costs will be clear and transparent, including any assumptions.
25. A small internal working group will be convened to provide expertise and constructive scrutiny. Support may need to be bought in during the remainder of 24/25 to support initial pace and prevent dilution of committed resource to deliver the existing FPMS work programme. More broadly, a new leadership model will be implemented within the Health, Population and Methods (HPaM) group to deliver through the right capability and rigour, maximising the opportunity for a modern census.
26. Establishing a new Board sub-committee is recommended, to assure the Board that its accountabilities are discharged in overseeing progress, direction and offering challenge. If the Board accept the proposals in this paper, a draft suggested terms of reference and membership will be circulated by correspondence for comment and approval and enable the inaugural meeting to take place prior to the March Board.
27. Programme governance will be refreshed in its entirety, noting the Board sub-committee and reflecting the adjusted ambition outlined in the business case. The integrated census

will be run as a single programme to support coherence and maintain the focus on user needs. We will conduct a single programme board, utilise the existing advisory committees to the National Statistician and maintain the Citizen Data Group.

28. If the Board accept this proposal, we will develop the statistical and operational design. The current priorities for the ONS have been set out for the current financial year, including significant investment in social surveys and restoring quality in some key economic statistics. The ONS team will take forward this proposal in a way that protects that work and does not interrupt the investment whilst driving forward this ambitious delivery programme. This will mean setting up a team that draws lightly on existing workforce, maintains proportionality to the task in hand, and makes use of wider resources available to us.

### Recommendation

29. If the Board agree with the proposal, it is suggested that the recommendation takes the form of a single statement. A proposed draft statement is below, and we would invite the board to consider this and provide advice, to allow the remainder of the document to be drafted to support this wording.
30. The National Statistician advises the Board, following a review of all evidence, to recommend the following:
31. On the advice of the National Statistician, and following a review of all evidence, the Authority recommends the following actions:
- i. the UK Government commission ONS to conduct a full census for England and Wales, creating a gold standard world-leading population statistics system, that supports UK coherence and maximises the benefits already created through administrative data;
  - ii. the UK Government continue to commission and resource the ONS to operationalise a record-level administrative-based census, from which to publish high-quality annual estimates of the population and migration; and
  - iii. the UK and Welsh Governments commit to the flow of the critical administrative datasets to support the above.

### **Conclusion**

32. Our confidence remains high in the potential to create a system that moves ONS away from a once in ten years high point of quality insight into our population. However, challenges remain to ensure an effective and trusted benchmark which builds broader stakeholder confidence.
33. There are limitations that cannot be fully mitigated at this point of the programme's maturity. Hence the proposal outlined in this paper would achieve the gold standard for population statistics, combining the ever-increasing benefits of administrative data and invoking the trusted and mandated power of a survey census.

**Emma Rourke, Deputy National Statistician and Director General for Health, Population and Methods, Ruth Studley, Director for Population Transformation, and Mary Gregory, Director for Population Statistics, ONS, 20 February 2025**



***Report on the UK Statistics Assembly***

**Purpose**

1. This paper provides the UK Statistics Authority Board with an introduction to the report on the first UK Statistics Assembly and the associated notes.

**Recommendations**

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to discuss the report.

**Background**

3. The first UK Statistics Assembly was organised by the UK Statistics Authority in partnership with the Royal Statistical Society. It was arranged in response to the first recommendation in the Independent Review of the Authority carried out by Professor Denise Lievesley CBE.

**Discussion**

4. The central recommendation of the Review of the UK Statistics Authority was that the Board should conduct a *“Statistical Assembly which will consult widely with statistics users and producers to understand the range of views regarding the priorities and data needs for the UK.”* This took place on 22 January 2025, and the National Statistician’s Expert User Advisory Committee (NSEUAC) was tasked with producing a summary report of the Assembly.
5. The Assembly consisted of 4 plenary sessions, and 15 breakout sessions on particular topics. The report summarises the high-level priorities which emerged from the meeting, as well as a list of actions which could be taken which would lead to material improvements in the short-term. It identifies a number of issues which cropped up across the 15 topic sessions, and then lists the main conclusions from within each topic session. These are grouped within topic, according to area of impact, and in each topic a handful is emphasised as of particular importance. A brief section summarises the perspective of the UK statistical system as seen from elsewhere. A final section presents reflections which can inform the conduct of future assemblies.

**Professor David Hand, Chair of NSEUAC, 19 February 2025**