

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Regulation Committee

Minutes

Thursday 5 June 2025

London Boardroom

13:15-16:00

Members Present

Prof. Dame Carol Propper (Chair)
Peter Barron
Sir Robert Chote
Prof. Sir David Spiegelhalter
Ed Humpherson

Other Attendees

Penny Babb (for item 6)
Gillian Fairbairn (for item 4)
Rob Kent-Smith
Marie McGhee (for item 6)
Helen Miller-Bakewell
Nicky Pearce
Anna Price (for item 6)
Gail Rankin
Vicki Stone (for item 4)
Sarah Whitehead (for item 4)

Observing

Yente Meijers
Liam Paradine-Ford
Mairi Spowage

Secretariat

Kate Beeslee
Sally-Ann Jones
Fran Wigley-Jones

Apologies

June Bowman
Siobhan Tuohy-Smith

1. Apologies, Minutes and Matters Arising

- 1.1. The Chair welcomed members and observers to the meeting.

2. Update from the Director General for Regulation SA(RC)(25)16

- 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 areas of focus since the last meeting.
- 2.2. The Committee heard that the refresh of the Code of Practice for Statistics was an important piece of work and that the Code set the tone for the statistics system. The Director General explained that the risk environment for OSR was more charged and that the corporate risks for both Voice and Relevance had been raised, and that the independence risk was under close review. Members emphasised that OSR provided regulation of all official statistics across government and noted a concern that people could view OSR as the regulator of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) exclusively. It would be important that this point about the breadth of OSR's work was raised in the upcoming Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) hearing.
- 2.3. OSR provided an overview of their work for new members and observers. The Committee heard that OSR's remit included:
 - i. accreditation of official statistics, which were confirmed by the Committee;
 - ii. deaccreditation, which was generally undertaken within OSR but significant cases could come to the Committee. Advice of the Committee may be sought via correspondence between meetings to ensure OSR could respond at pace;
 - iii. OSR's Systemic Reviews may include reviews of the statistical system (State of the Statistical System); or, an evaluation of certain set or theme of statistics to identify potential improvements, for example, the recent economic statistics review;
 - iv. casework also dominated OSR's workload and was reported to the Committee; and
 - v. this was completed alongside production of general organisational requirements such as a strategy and annual reports.
- 2.4. The following points were also raised:
 - i. OSR advised that they would soon write to ONS in relation to the recommendations in OSR's September 2024 review of gender identity in the England and Wales Census to confirm it considered that the recommendations for use of the census gender identity statistics were now actioned. Those related to the gender identity question development remained open;
 - ii. OSR concluded the 2024/25 year with 219 pieces of casework. There were currently 30 cases since the beginning of the 2025/26 year, covering a wide range of topics, most notably the gambling survey. Though 30 seemed like a low number of cases, it was expected that the increased volume evident during the pandemic was coming to an end, and that there was usually a surge in the autumn; and
 - iii. ongoing work on the development functions was progressing well, noting the Code of Practice and development of a policy on how to use generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) within OSR.
- 2.5. The Committee approved the proposal for accredited official statistics for Accident and Emergency (A&E) statistics, OSR were satisfied that the six requirements had been met or closed.

3. State of the Statistical System Draft Report SA(RC)(25)17

- 3.1. OSR provided an update to the Committee on its key messages from the State of the Statistical System report and set out plans for developing and publishing the report.
- 3.2. The Committee heard that meetings with the Chief Statisticians of the devolved administrations, and Deputy Heads of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) were

being held to receive their feedback and that a draft would be circulated to members by the end of the following week.

- 3.3. OSR shared that the report reflected a similar landscape to 2024, but some of the risks highlighted last year were greater, using the reliability of administrative data and challenges of survey response rates as examples of these. Additions to the report include discussion on public trust in ONS statistics, the revised Code of Practice for Statistics, and government reviews and inquiries.
- 3.4. The following points were raised in discussion:
 - i. the report should be transparent on the existing challenges to the ONS and Government Statistical Service (GSS) and should evaluate whether issues, such as quality, were a system wide issue or specific to ONS;
 - ii. that the DG for Regulation was soon to publish a blog on how official statistics were feeding into the government missions. English data was most often used for UK policy and he believed this issue was not receiving enough attention;
 - iii. that topical challenges, such as whether long standing goals around administrative data were being realised and Artificial Intelligence (AI) should be highlighted; and
 - iv. the challenge of declining survey response rates, noting that response differed based on the topic of the survey, but that the ONS in particular had suffered.
- 3.5. The Committee noted that OSR aimed to publish the report prior to the summer break but members agreed the timing should enable the UK Statistics Authority/Cabinet Office review of ONS performance and culture to be included, given its importance to the system as a whole.

4. Draft Assessment Reports

- 4.1. Three draft assessment reports were brought to the Committee for their approval.
- 4.2. On the 2021 Census in England and Wales, Phase 3 (SA(RC)(25)18), the Committee heard that OSR gave the ONS one requirement and six recommendations to support user engagement and trust in census data. Members questioned why sex and gender was not included more explicitly but heard that other OSR work on sex and gender would be referenced and linked to in the report.
- 4.3. On Cancer Waiting Times Statistics in England (NHS England) (SA(RC)(25)19), the Committee heard that these statistics became more high profile following the introduction of new cancer waiting time standards in October 2023. The report provided four requirements to NHS England which emphasised enhancing transparency, presentation, and granularity to support users.
- 4.4. There was significant discussion around the implications of the abolition of NHS England, but OSR commended the team for their engagement and commitment to implementing the requirements. OSR would write to the NHS England Head of Profession (HoP) about the assessment report with general messages for their consideration as they reorganised. Members suggested that the letter give clear guidance. Members agreed with the findings of the report and commented on the challenge of using the statistics, noting a lack of context and metadata that supported the framing of the data.
- 4.5. On Public Transport Statistics (SA(RC)(25)20), the Committee reviewed whether the statistics should maintain their accreditation. Members heard that the statistics were valued and informed a lot of decisions in Northern Ireland. OSR provided two requirements which centred around ensuring information is easy to find, user-friendly, and provided narrative around what the statistics can and cannot be used for.
- 4.6. The Committee agreed the following assessment reports:
 - i. 2021 Census in England and Wales;

- ii. Statistics about Cancer Waiting Times in England (NHS England); and
- iii. Public Transport Statistics Northern Ireland.

5. ONS New Domestic Violence Questions in the Crime Survey for England and Wales

5.1. OSR outlined its approach to reviewing the new domestic violence statistics. ONS have developed new questions on domestic abuse in the Crime Survey for England and Wales to better capture data on experiences of domestic abuse. ONS planned to publish headline estimates from these questions in July and the OSR review would determine if the statistics could be accredited. Due to timings of the publication, OSR would share the review by correspondence before the next Regulation Committee meeting. This work followed on from the compliance check undertaken in April 2023 and of the reaccreditation of estimates from the crime survey for England and Wales in November 2024.

5.2. The following points were raised in the discussion:

- i. members requested that the review addressed any risk of false positives due to respondents misinterpreting the questions;
- ii. ONS would be engaging with domestic violence charities;
- iii. members asked that the new questions were shared. OSR confirmed that ONS had published information about how it researched and tested the questions;
- iv. members recognised that the existing domestic abuse estimates were accredited but did not align to the current legislation and questioned if this posed an issue for the regulator. OSR confirmed that this work followed on from a compliance check undertaken in April 2023, which focused on the development of the new questions, and the reaccreditation of all Crime Survey for England and Wales estimates in November 2024.

5.3. Members would be asked to confirm accreditation in correspondence.

6. Code Update (SA(RC)(25)21)

6.1. Penny Babb shared an updated draft of the Code of Practice. OSR sought approval from the Committee to put the current draft of the Code to the Authority Board in June, for consideration.

6.2. Since the Committee last commented on the draft Code, OSR had responded to a large volume of feedback from a range of stakeholders, which it received during its consultation on the Code. Significant changes included:

- i. the 'Guiding principles' have been renamed to the 'Code principles', to help clarify their role and position in the Code. The main audience for the principles has been set out and the principles have been restructured to create a clearer line between Trustworthiness, Quality and Value, and the Standards for Official Statistics;
- ii. the Standards for Official Statistics have been amended to reinforce that leadership and quality culture apply to all producers of statistics; and
- iii. renaming and clearer presentation of the 'Standards for the Use of Statistics in Public Communication', previously called the 'Standards for Intelligent Transparency', and the principles that support them.

6.3. Members raised the following points in discussion:

- i. the use of ten Code principles was effective;
- ii. the name of the Standards for the Use of Statistics in Public Communication should be reconsidered, to further clarify that these standards support use of statistics, data and wider analysis in the public domain;

- iii. the guidance the Standards for Official Statistics provided on pre-empting misunderstanding and how to avoid misleading statistics was positive and should be more prominent;
 - iv. the section on pre-empting misuse of statistics in the Standards for the Use of Statistics in Public Communication should be strengthened by adding more information on uncertainty, quality, and pre-empting misunderstandings. The section should also emphasise that users of statistics had an equal responsibility not to misrepresent statistics beyond the initial release;
 - v. within the Standards for the Use of Statistics in Public Communication, section two on supporting understanding should be strengthened to prevent the misuse and cherry-picking of statistics;
 - vi. the definition of quality could be made clearer and more ambitious; and
 - vii. members welcomed guidance relevant to users, as well as producers, of statistics.
- 6.4. OSR agreed to update the Code in line with feedback provided by members before sharing the draft Code with the Authority Board in June. OSR would return to the Regulation Committee and the Authority Board in July for final sign off ahead of publication.

7. OSR Annual Report, Annual Review of Casework (SA(RC)(25)22)

- 7.1. OSR provided an update on the draft OSR Annual Report and the Annual Review of Casework for 2024/25. This would be provided as an annex to the Authority's Annual Report 2024/25 for approval by the Authority Board before it would be laid before Parliament in July. The Authority Report and Accounts and OSR annual report would be published in parallel on the respective Authority and OSR websites.
- 7.2. Positive comments were received on the Annual Report. The Committee noted that the OSR Annual Report represented the role of OSR well. There was discussion of whether the report could be stronger and members discussed the challenges faced by the Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat). The DG noted this had been considered and discussed between OSR Senior Leadership Team.
- 7.3. OSR gave an overview of the Annual Review of Casework. OSR sought to publish this document before the State of the Statistical System. Members raised that with the Annual Report, Annual Review of Casework and State of the Statistical System all being published around the end of June, there was a risk of some information getting lost.

8. OSR Strategy and Business Plan (SA(RC)(25)23)

- 8.1. The DG for Regulation provided an update on the development of the OSR five-year strategy and the 2025/26 business plan.
- 8.2. The Committee heard that OSR has undertaken targeted engagements with stakeholders and were working with the Authority to develop coherent strategies. From these engagements, OSR noted a need to be rigorous in providing assurance on official statistics. The Committee noted there was a demand for OSR to be more visibly rigorous.
- 8.3. The following points were raised in discussion:
 - i. the tone of the strategy was effective, but innovation should be better defined, and OSR's core values of trustworthiness, quality, and value should be presented more strongly; and
 - ii. the development of the Code and use of AI was a valuable example of innovation.

9. OSR Research: Official Statistics and personal decisions (SA(RC)(25)24)

- 9.1. Helen Miller-Bakewell delivered a presentation on OSR research into the role of official statistics in personal decision-making. This was an example of wider work done by OSR

to enhance understanding of what members of the public want and need from statistics, to help OSR regulate more effectively.

- 9.2. OSR found that there was an appetite from individuals to use official statistics in personal decision-making. The research found that the public were most likely to use official statistics, sometimes without realising they were official statistics, alongside other sources of evidence to make personal decisions. Some of the ways they were used included as an objective comparator and to gain reassurance when decision-making.
- 9.3. To better support the public's ability to use statistics, and thus serve the public good, the research has led to recommendations for producers to help:
 - i. improve the clarity of official statistics;
 - ii. present different levels of information for different users;
 - iii. increase public awareness of official statistics;
 - iv. improve the relevance of official statistics; and
 - v. enhance the trustworthiness of official statistics.
- 9.4. Members thanked OSR for the presentation and were pleased to see emphasis on the value of statistics for the public good. They supported the recommendation for further collaboration between producers and intermediaries, to ensure official statistics were presented effectively. They also recommended stakeholders in the academic and official statistics landscape who the research could be shared with.

10. Horizon Scanning

- 10.1. In preparation for the DG for Regulation and the Authority Chair's presentation of evidence at the PACAC inquiry, the DG asked members for any themes they thought may come up. Members raised themes of whether the regulatory function had been sufficiently clear and direct in its regulatory judgements, challenges of economic statistics, and relationship with the UK Statistics Authority and the ONS.

11. Any Other Business

- 11.1. The Committee would next meet on the 21st July. This would be a remote meeting.

| Date | No | Item ref | Action | Update / Status |
|----------|----|---|--|-----------------|
| 06.06.25 | 5 | Update from the Director General for Regulation SA(RC)(25)16 | OSR to bring information item on gambling survey work to next meeting | |
| 06.06.25 | 6 | Draft Assessment Reports SA(RC)(25)19 | OSR to write to NHS England and DHSC Heads of Professions with the results of the assessment report for them to consider as they organise. | |
| 06.06.25 | 7 | Draft Assessment Reports SA(RC)(25)19 | Cancer Waiting Times Report to include clear guidance and recommendations for future NHS England to implement. | |
| 06.06.25 | 8 | ONS new domestic violence questions in the Crime Survey for England and Wales | OSR to share new questions (Evaluating a new measure of domestic abuse - Office for National Statistics) | |
| 06.06.25 | 9 | Code Update SA(RC)(25)21 | OSR to action comments for review by Authority Board at June meeting | |