

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Minutes

**Thursday 31 July 2025
London Boardroom**

Hybrid Meeting

Members Present

Sir Robert Chote (Chair)
Dr Jacob Abboud
Peter Barron
Ed Humpherson
Prof. Sir David Spiegelhalter
Professor Mairi Spowage
Professor Dame Carol Propper
Emma Rourke
Dr Sarah Walsh
Penny Young

Other Attendees

June Bowman
Grant Fitzner
Sarah Moore
Tom Taylor
Rob Kent-Smith (for item 4)
Jane Naylor (for item 7)
Jason Bradbury (for item 7)
Steve Ellerd-Elliott (for item 7)
Alex Lambert (for item 8)
Kate Davies (for item 8)
Philippa Bonay (for item 9)

Secretariat

Sally Jones
Sarah Cobden

Apologies

None

1. Apologies

- 1.1. There were no apologies.

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 26 June 2025 were approved.

4. Report from the Authority Chair [SA(25)36]

- 4.1. Non-Executive Directors had met before the meeting.
- 4.2. The Chair reported on activities since the Board last met, highlighting the following:
 - i. the recruitment for the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Permanent Secretary was progressing well through the necessary processes;
 - ii. the recruitment of a new independent member for the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) was nearly complete;
 - iii. the campaign for a new Authority Chair was live and would close on 5 September, current Deputy Chair, Penny Young would act as Chair during any interim period;
 - iv. the Chair and Deputy Chair planned to meet with the ScotStat Board to discuss the 2031 Census and how the Boards can cooperate to ensure coordination across the devolved administrations; and
 - v. to improve visibility and transparency, non-Executive Directors were considering how to communicate what was discussed at Board meetings to staff. This would be discussed further with the new Permanent Secretary.

5. Report from the Chief Executive [SA(25)37]

- 5.1. Emma Rourke provided the Board with an overview of activity and issues since the last meeting highlighting the following:
 - i. following changes to ONS's executive governance, the Executive Committee (ExCo) continued to meet weekly and the meetings had been extended to two hours. This would ensure there would be sufficient time to discuss items and progress through the volume of work;
 - ii. ExCo had discussed a paper on the prioritisation and financing of the Census 2031 Taskforce. ExCo agreed the 2031 census was a priority for the organisation, alongside the Economic Statistics Plan (ESP) and Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan (SIEP). At their July meeting, the Inter-Administration Committee endorsed a UK wide platform to improve coherence of census data;
 - iii. there were ongoing and challenging discussions with union representatives on the policy for mandatory office attendance;
 - iv. the Civil Service gender pay gap information had been published which showed the ONS was performing better than the wider Civil Service in terms of pay and bonus gap;
 - v. James Benford would begin his role as Director General for Economic, Social, and Environmental Group on 4 August. Emma thanked Grant Fitzner for his interim leadership and his work on the ESP. James was already undergoing an induction on key issues and was attending various meetings; and
 - vi. there was significant demand from delegated grades for increased Q&A sessions with senior leaders. There was a goal to move towards a more forward facing, solution-orientated phase in the organisation's recovery.
2. The following points were raised in discussion:
 - i. recovery following the unsatisfactory data governance internal audit was raised. The next steps were discussed and members were informed that actions were underway. An update would be provided to the September ARAC meeting;

- ii. there were ongoing discussions around the financial position and how to reallocate resources to deliver high-priority projects; and
 - iii. a lessons learned exercise following the closure of the Integrated Data Service had been initiated and the ONS would welcome the honest and constructive feedback. As a Government Major Portfolio Project (GMPP), this would be part of a formal National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA) gateway review and would be published.
3. The members noted the update.
- 6. Report from the Director General for Regulation [SA(25)38]**
- 6.1. Ed Humpherson and Rob Kent-Smith provided an overview of regulatory activities since the last meeting. The update focused on the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) budget proposal and asked the Board to approve the recommendation for OSR's 2026/27 and 2028/29 budget.
- 6.2. Members heard that the recommendation was supported by Regulation Committee at their July meeting. The proposed intermediate option would deliver additional regulatory capacity.
- 6.3. The following points were raised in discussion:
- i. the OSR budget had received a flat cash settlement for the previous three budget cycles. A cut to the budget would lead to a loss of capacity and reduced ability to regulate;
 - ii. the priorities for OSR included delivering risk-based regulation and managing the backlog of statistics that had not been reviewed in some time; and
 - iv. an early approval of the budget would allow OSR to initiate recruitment immediately.
4. Members were supportive of the uplifted budget which would support increased capacity to deliver OSR's priorities.
- 7. Report from the Chair of Regulation Committee**
- 7.1. Professor Dame Carol Propper provided an update. Regulation Committee last met on 21 July. She informed members that Regulation Committee had discussed the OSR budget settlement at length and recommended the proposed option based on the importance of strengthening the regulation of official statistics, systematic risks identified by Ed Humpherson, and the support expressed by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC).
- 8. Communications update**
- 8.1. Peter Barron and Sarah Moore reported on recent media coverage of ONS and reflected on positive coverage of some statistics that had been published. There had been some negative coverage following the publication of the Devereux Review. It was anticipated that there would be further negative coverage to come in reaction to the PACAC hearings. Following publication of the ESP and SIEP initial feedback from stakeholders had been positive based on the publication of the ESP and SIEP.
- 9. Government Statistical Service [SA(25)39]**
- 9.1. Joint Deputy Heads of the Government Statistical Service (GSS), Jane Naylor, Jason Bradbury and Steve Ellerd-Elliott, presented on the challenges and opportunities for the UK Statistical System. They asked for the Board's reflections on the implementation of the GSS strategic vision and considered how best to engage with the Authority Board.
- 9.2. The Board heard that the GSS was focused on four key issues including governance, funding and prioritisation, community and collaboration, and future of leadership and career development. The following points were raised in discussion:
- i. the challenge of ensuring prioritisation and coherence across a non-centralised system. Members discussed how best to ensure collaboration between the Authority, the National Statistician and the GSS;

- ii. it would be valuable to raise the Board's visibility within the GSS through events;
 - iii. the HoPs were hoping to build community, with an emphasis on diversity and inclusion;
 - iv. the Authority Strategy could support the GSS with prioritisation;
 - v. there was strong support for the development of a talent pipeline to build capability and skills of statisticians not just their statistical skills but to be future leaders, as outlined in the Devereux Review; and
 - vi. the temporary splitting of the National Statistician and Permanent Secretary role might lead to greater capacity for the National Statistician to engage with the GSS. The Authority Strategy should highlight the value of the GSS and encourage collaboration across the system.
- 9.3. The Board commended the coherent proposition and thanked the Deputy Heads for their work to support the Acting National Statistician. Members offered to participate in events to raise the Board's visibility. It was agreed that the Board would periodically attend Heads of Profession meetings to give an update on Board activity.

10. Economic Statistics Plan update [SA(25)40] and Survey Improvement Plan update [SA(25)41]

- 10.1. Grant Fitzner, Alex Lambert and Kate Davies introduced respective papers updating on the progress and report early warnings of risks to the Economic Statistics Plan and Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan.
- 10.2. Members heard that projects had been set up with strong governance structures and strong reporting line into ExCo. The following points were raised in discussion:
- i. there had been progress on moving Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) online but there were still risks as outlined in the paper;
 - ii. the field interviewer headcount had a net increase of 135 since April 2025 and the number of completed interview responses to the Living Costs and Food Survey had increased since June 2025;
 - iii. the capability to remove legacy technology was a concern and could impact the ability to progress on other parts of the plan, with the potential that some milestones may need to be descoped if the organisation was not able to move away from legacy technology;
 - iv. the significant scale up in field community brought some managerial challenges so there was a need for greater resource devoted to managing capability around such a large scale increase;
 - v. processes had been introduced to reduce field force turnover and there was a more granular planning approach with greater focus on regional recruitment to target key areas;
 - vi. while opportunities for redeployment of staff to priority areas had been identified, the pace of deployment was slower and there was still a skills gap. To help resolve this, 100 new roles had been approved in areas of Economic Statistics Production and Analysis, and Macro-Economic Statistics Analysis.
 - vii. deprioritisation would need to be handled carefully with colleagues, with a key focus on ensuring core outputs were appropriately resourced;
 - viii. there would be greater use of existing methodologies and pipelines to streamline the outputs.
- 10.3. Members noted the update and were supportive of the successes and progress made while recognising the challenges and the need to keep monitoring progress.

11. People update [SA(25)42]

- 11.1. Philippa Bonay presented a set of slides which provided a people update to the Board on key developments in recruitment, staff turnover, speaking up and whistleblowing. There was ongoing work on colleague sentiment by the Communications directorate. People and Business Services (PBS) were working to ensure there were strong procedures and policies for colleagues wishing to raise a concern and speak up. The following points were raised in discussion:

- i. PBS had been working with the Chair of ARAC to respond to feedback from the People item presented at the June ARAC meeting;
- ii. there was a need for better understanding of the skills within the organisation. PBS were working with directors on increased granularity to be able to respond to demand signals and ensure the organisation was equipped with the correct skills;
- iii. it might be beneficial to investigate whether an ONS specific strategy would be useful for prioritisation;
- iv. lessons would be learned from the actions taken following the 2023 psychological safety report to resolve ongoing culture issues also identified in the Devereux Review;
- v. the NEDs had recently developed a route for SCS colleagues to contact them. There was some discussion on the need to make sure this did not confuse the raising a concern/whistleblowing processes. NEDs felt it was important that staff had an opportunity to engage with them directly but understood PBS concerns. Strategy and Policy colleagues would work with PBS and NEDs to ensure the processes could be complimentary;
- vi. members appreciated the strategic workforce planning and suggested that it would be useful to build on this in preparation for the ESP;
- vii. it would be beneficial for members to understand a timeline of the actions implemented against the People Survey actions and other major reviews to assure the Board of progress, what has worked and lessons learnt;
- viii. targets and measures of success would be important markers of progress and PBS were working to implement updated targets within Management Information since changes to governance to ensure the targets reflected the strategic goals of the organisation; and
- ix. a cohesive message from the senior leadership team would be vital when communicating changes in prioritisation to business areas and junior colleagues. There should be an emphasis on moving away from siloed working and improving cohesiveness across the organisation.

11.2. Members noted the update.

Action: Secretariat to share PBS slides with Board members.

12. Any Other Business

12.1. The Board would next meet on Thursday 25 September.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
Agenda
Thursday 31 July 2025, 11.00-14.00
London Boardroom, Hybrid Meeting

Chair: Sir Robert Chote

Apologies: None

Attendees: Rob Kent-Smith (for item 4), Jason Bradbury (for item 7), Steve Ellerd-Elliott (for item 7), Jane Naylor (for item 7), Grant Fitzner (for item 8), Alex Lambert, (for item 8), Kate Davies (for item 8), Philippa Bonay (for item 9), Penny Babb (for item 10), Marie McGhee (for item 10), Nicky Pearce (for item 10)

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 26 June 2025
2 11.20-11.30 10 mins	Report from the Authority Chair	SA(25)36 Sir Robert Chote
3 11.30-12.00 30 mins	Report from the Chief Executive	SA(25)37 Emma Rourke
4 12.00-12.10 10 mins	Report from the Director General for Regulation	SA(25)38 Ed Humpherson Rob Kent-Smith
5 12.10-12.15 5 mins	Report from Committee Chair Regulation Committee	Oral update Prof. Dame Carol Propper
6 12.15-12.25 10 mins	Communications update	Oral update Peter Barron Sarah Moore
12.25-12.30 5 mins	Break	
7 12.30-12.55 25 mins	Government Statistical Service	SA(25)39 Jane Naylor Jason Bradbury Steve Ellerd-Elliott
8 12.55-13.20 25 mins	- Economic Statistics Plan Update - Survey Enhancement and Improvement Plan Update	SA(25)40 SA(25)41 Grant Fitzner Alex Lambert Kate Davies
9 13.20-13.55 35 mins	People Update	SA(25)42 Philippa Bonay
10 13.55-14.00 5 mins	Any Other Business	

Next meeting: Thursday 25 September, Colby House Boardroom, Belfast

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(25)36

Chair's Report, July 2025

Purpose

1. This paper provides the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) with an overview of the Chair's activity in July.

Review of recent activities

2. This month, my main focus has been our appearances before the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) on 1 and 8 July. The Acting National Statistician, Director General for Regulation and I gave evidence to the Committee's inquiry over two days on the work of the UK Statistics Authority (the Authority). We covered a range of issues including leadership and organisational culture, economic statistics, recruitment practices, and prioritisation of resources. We expect the Committee to take further evidence from witnesses including the Cabinet Office after Parliamentary recess, and report their recommendations towards the end of this year.
3. On 16 July I met with Dame Meg Hillier, Chair of the Treasury Select Committee. The meeting primarily focused on the implementation of the Devereux review, including senior appointments, and the Office for National Statistics (ONS)'s plans for the Labour Force Survey / Transformed Labour Force Survey including the timeline for progress. Since our meeting, the ONS has shared its second quarterly update with the Committee, as committed during the National Statistician's evidence session in February.
4. On 17 July, I met with Dr Sarah Cumbers and Professor Sir John Aston of the Royal Statistical Society to discuss the recommendations of the Devereux review and future governance arrangements including ongoing senior appointment processes which are moving at pace.
5. On senior appointments, the advert for the Authority Chair went live on 24 July with a closing date of 5 September. I will be on the panel for ONS Permanent Secretary interviews on 28 July. The Cabinet Office is in the process of enlisting an external search agency to support them with the recruitment of the National Statistician role, and will then look to refine the job description.
6. This month we were pleased to receive confirmation from the Cabinet Office that Ministers have approved Penny Young as Deputy Chair of the Authority and Acting Chair between my departure and the appointment of a successor. Penny has agreed to take on the role of Acting Chair from September 29 and will work with my Private Office to ensure a smooth handover.
7. I have continued to hold my regular catch-ups with the Acting National Statistician, Director General for Regulation, Deputy Director of Strategy and Policy, and Committee Chairs.

Correspondence

8. On 16 July I responded to a letter from Helen Morgan MP regarding the Government's claims about additional NHS appointments.

Sir Robert Chote, Chair, 24 July 2025

Chief Executive's Report, July 2025

Purpose

1. This provides the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) with an overview of activity since the last Board meeting on 26 June 2025.

The latest month has been a challenging one for the organisation as we respond to the findings and recommendations laid out in the Devereux review

2. Since last reporting to the Board, we have seen the publication of Sir Robert Devereux's review into the "performance and culture" of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which was published on 26 June. Whilst noting the steps taken thus far, including the governance changes and publishing our plans for economic statistics and surveys in parallel with the review, several deep-seated issues were highlighted that need to be addressed. These issues include a reluctance, at senior levels, to hear and act on difficult news, and needing a stronger system of planning and budgeting to appropriately resource core statistics, data collection and the transition from legacy technology.
3. As an Executive Committee (ExCo), we have been discussing how we collectively respond to- and begin to implement- the recommendations detailed in the review. First and foremost, we remain committed to building an effective team that can make the right decisions for the organisation. Our response will address systemic issues highlighted within the review as well as any areas for further improvement from staff, with restoring trust in senior leadership and rebuilding the organisation's culture at the forefront of this effort.
4. In the last month, I have hosted several virtual and in-person all-SCS, and Grade 6 & 7, sessions to plan our response to the review and ensure that we coordinate activity aligned to not just the priorities of the senior leadership, but also that of the wider office.
5. The first phase of internal engagement has focused on listening to the views and feedback of colleagues who have openly expressed their response to the review and associated media. This has occurred at a corporate level, led by me (such as through Monday Morning Colleagues), as well as group and directorate level engagement to explore local-level reactions. The second phase, which commenced in mid-July is moving to a more deliberate, structured approach to articulating the root causes of our cultural and performance issues and moving towards a suite of commitments the whole leadership, from the Executive Committee to Grade 6 & 7, can effectively own.
6. In addition to responding to the Devereux review, ExCo have met to consider how we release resource from lower-priority work so people with the right skills and capabilities can be reallocated to activities included within the Plan for Economic Statistics and assure ourselves of progress towards commitments in the Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan. A first suite of decisions having been made, ExCo will reconvene to discuss prioritisation again in early August and will be informed by a full review of all ONS outputs, with criticality scored by each government department. As we operate in a tight fiscal environment, with an increase in full time equivalent (FTE) staff from Quarter Three 2024/25 to Quarter One 2025/26 a key driver in increasing expenditure trajectory overall, recruitment freezes have been put into place in some parts of the organisation to ensure we first maximise the ability to redeploy existing staff before recruiting into remaining vacancies. Deployment of existing resource towards our highest priorities helps affordability and makes the best use of existing skillsets.

7. On 1 and 8 July, Sir Robert Chote, Ed Humpherson and I gave evidence to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC). These were challenging sessions that went into detail on our governance, culture, processes, and programmes, such as the Integrated Data Service (IDS) and Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS). We will follow-up in writing to additional requests for information from the Committee, and keep the Board updated on the progress of the Committee's Inquiry.
8. I have briefed senior members of the Analysis Function and the Government Statistical Service (GSS) on the PACAC hearings and Devereux Review. There is a positive and collegiate desire to meaningfully support ONS in our recovery as well as use fora such as the National Statistician's Executive Group and meetings with departmental directors of analysis for system wide lessons learned conversations.
9. In the latest month, we have confirmed the following appointments: Professor Evelyn Collins, to Chair of the National Statistician's Inclusive Data Advisory committee (NSIDAC); Dame Kate Barker, to Chair of the National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee (NSEUAC); Professor Martin Weale, to Chair of the National Statistician's Committee for Advice on Standards for Economic Statistics (NSCASE). In the coming weeks, the appointment process to Chair of the National Statistician's Advisory Committee on National Accounts will conclude.
10. The affordability risk highlighted in the June report has materialised when we consider the current business driven financial forecasts.
11. An overspend, driven by an upward trending FTE staffing figure, would be a clear breach of expenditure control totals and requires action to address. This action commenced immediately after the Period Three figures were available in an initial quarterly financial/affordability review at ExCo on 15 July. As one of the outcomes of this meeting ExCo members were asked to review their positions (staffing trajectories and non-salary cost forecasts) in readiness for a follow up ExCo session on 6 August. A full review of uncommitted spend which is sitting in budgets is also being reviewed for potential reallocation.
12. The Annual Report and Accounts document was presented to Parliament on 17 July in line with timelines previously provided to the Board. The Comptroller and Auditor General (C&AG) certified the 2024/25 financial statements with an unqualified audit opinion. The C&AG qualified the regularity opinion as a result of the previous breach of Cabinet Office controls and the materiality of the related, cumulative contract spend, which had been noted in the 2024/25 Annual Report and Accounts. We are extremely grateful for Board and Audit and Risk Assurance Committee members review and input into this process.

Our focus is now on the implementation of our plan to restore confidence and improve quality in our economic statistics, alongside our business-as-usual activity

13. Our largest transformation programme, the TLFS, saw a significant milestone this month with the short TLFS core survey launching successfully on 7 July. The survey is currently performing as per expectations, with reduced completion time and partials. An accelerated programme of online testing for complex data capture has been approved in the last week.
14. On 10 July, Prices division released an indicative business prices dataset to make key Producer Prices Inflation / Services Producer Prices Inflation (PPI / SPPI) series available to users. This is the first step on our journey to restarting monthly business prices bulletins following their suspension in March 2025.
15. On 11 July, the Advisory Panel on Consumer Price Statistics (Stakeholder; APCP) met to discuss future prioritisation (in light of the Devereux review), and recommendations on future improvements to consumer price inflation (CPI) statistics. This was the first APCP

(Stakeholder) meeting led by Jonathan Haskel following his appointment as chair earlier this year.

16. ExCo have also discussed the latest position on the output quality early warning system. Emerging risks to quality are related to data collected through social surveys, legacy and technology, and resourcing and skills, with good progress on addressing issues in Producer Prices Inflation (PPI).
17. Our social survey data collection performance in June was stronger than at any point since the pandemic, with five of the seven face-to-face interviewer targets met. The specific improvement actions on the Living Cost and Food survey (LCF; reported at the last board) have also had a significant positive impact. June LCF completed interview estimates exceeded 450 interviews compared with the performance dip in April of 334 interviews after several new staff joined the survey. A short-term seasonal interview performance drop is expected during August due to respondent holidays.
18. The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) 2025 round has made notable progress, including expansion of digital data collection and Artificial Intelligence based classification; on day 55/77 in the round, we are 60 per cent of the way to achieving our target of 175,000 person-level records. Significant additional resource has been invested, but instability and inefficiency of legacy systems remains a blocker. As described in the Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan, we are working towards the removal of all legacy technology for ASHE. While digital by default collection in 2026 looks feasible, some elements particularly for data processing are in doubt.

The government has now published its response to the Census recommendation, meaning a whole-population census of England and Wales will take place in 2031

19. Media coverage of the Government's response to the Future of Population and Migration Statistics (FPMS) recommendation, formally commissioning the ONS to conduct a census in 2031, has been largely positive. Georgia Gould MP is quoted as saying, "The 2031 census is an important milestone providing essential insights for businesses and public services. It will support our delivery of a decade of national renewal – targeting public services where they are needed, managing migration and growing our economy". Other outlets, including Research Live, speak to the voices of stakeholders being "listened to".
20. In recent weeks, ExCo have discussed our risk appetite and options to support resourcing the ramp up to the Census this financial year, with a small number of more urgent posts being escalated separately. ExCo will receive a bid for further funds to support the census taskforce for the remainder of the financial year on 30 July, which will influence the scale of further prioritisation internally. Not all skills will be available internally; accordingly, the recruitment timelines will need to be considered in delivery plans.
21. The Board sub-committee for the Census 2031 will meet for the first time in September for an introductory session, and it is anticipated that a second meeting will be held before Christmas to consider more substantive assurance matters.
22. Our regular publication of population statistics has continued with the mid-2024 (and revised mid-2022 and mid-2023) population estimates for England and Wales by age, sex and local authority, released on 30 July, accompanied by Admin Based Population Estimates, which have been published for comparison purposes, as official statistics in development. The population estimates for 2022, 2023 and 2024 will differ to those recently published in the population projections (for England local authorities) because the estimates use more recent migration data.
23. On 30 July, the Inter Administration Committee (IAC) will meet to consider updates from the Census Taskforce and GSS Coherence teams. The IAC will also consider proposals to re-establish the UK Census Committee, and the recommendations of the recent Office

for Statistics Regulation (OSR) report on the adequacy of UK-wide comparable statistics and data, alongside Cabinet Office proposals for a detailed response to address recommendation five of the Lievesley review.

24. Our International Relations team have been engaging in high-level meetings with global partners including the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Japanese Parliament, Eurostat, and the World Health Organisation (WHO). Mary Gregory and I also met with the New Zealand's Acting Government Statistician, Mary Craig, and New Zealand's Minister of Science, Innovation, Technology and Statistics, Minister Reti, to discuss the census and to exchange learnings. Meanwhile, our International Development Team has been managing international census partnerships and demographic survey planning.

A decision has been taken to close the Integrated Data Programme (IDP) following the publication of the plan for economic statistics and the reprioritisation of core statistics

25. ExCo endorsed the activities underway for closure of the IDP and outlined the need to develop clear options by the end of September to inform decisions on how we use the valuable assets from the programme. ExCo also agreed to close the open front door to the IDS, move away from the IDS branding and put in place strict exceptions criteria for any future external access, including cost recovery. The existing analytical pipeline of ONS projects will now support our core statistics.
26. ExCo have also been provided a first progress report on the Strategic Review on Data Governance. This included some early findings of the engagement with comparator organisations on the components of effective data governance. The Strategic Review was commissioned following an 'Unsatisfactory' Internal Audit into data governance.

We're continuing to strengthen our wider operations and reinforce our data infrastructure to ensure the organisation is ready for the next period of delivery

27. Legal services are developing a strategy to strengthen our compliance with data protection legislation, raise the awareness of data protection requirements, upskill those staff who may need additional data protection training and increase engagement externally with data protection professionals inside government.
28. Our people capabilities are being strengthened with the launch of the Line Management Development Tool (LMDT). The LMDT has been designed specifically to support all line managers, regardless of grade or experience, to more meaningfully reflect on their current strengths and identify areas for growth in a leadership context. The tool also provides access to tailored learning resources and encourages colleagues to be transparent in how they approach the development of their leadership capability. Taken together, resources available to staff will provide the foundations for a more open culture for discussion on line management and change management across the organisation.
29. Following the acquisition of VMWare by Broadcom in May 2024, ONS made the decision to move all Virtual Machines (more commonly known as servers), which underpinned many of the legacy applications that provide key outputs, back to the Crown Data Centre. Overall, 299 Virtual Machines have been migrated, with 168 others being deleted altogether, a major success by our Digital Services team in moving away from legacy technology and maintaining continuity of business processing.

Emma Rourke, Acting National Statistician, 24 July 2025

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(25)38

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.
2. In addition, the Board are asked to approve recommendations from the Regulation Committee (the Committee) for OSR's budget for the years 2026/27 to 2028/29. This is set out paragraphs three to six and supported by the Regulation Committee paper.

Discussion

3. **Proposed OSR Budget:** On 11 June 2025 the government concluded the Spending Review 25 (SR25) process and announced departmental spending totals covering the financial years to 2028/29, this included confirming the UK Statistics Authority budget. At its July meeting, the Regulation Committee considered budget proposals prepared by the OSR Executive.
4. The paper sets out a range of factors that influence OSR's request for an increase in budget.
 - i. **rigorous regulation supporting the priorities set out for the Office of National Statistics (ONS):** As the independent statistics regulator, we will play an important part in validating the trustworthiness, quality and value of Accredited Official Statistics produced by ONS, including the priority statistics, recovery programmes and Census preparations highlighted;
 - ii. **systemic regulatory impact:** We have a wider remit to regulate the whole of the UK Statistical System. We do this through the provision of system intelligence about the state of the statistical system, plus prevention activity to reduce systemic failures in the use of statistics. The provision of the Code of Practice for Statistics and supporting advice and guidance is central to upholding official statistics, as is campaigning for, and supporting producers on, topics like intelligent transparency and data access and linkage; and
 - iii. **delivering a Regulatory Programme that is risk-based and manages down the debt in Accredited Official Statistics:** Through our engagement with stakeholders many feel that we are not sufficiently resourced, given the scale of the challenges the system faces, but both they and we recognise the wider fiscal environment. As we seek to meet the growing demands for our services, we have had to make difficult choices, accumulating a debt of Accredited Official Statistics that we have not been able to review for some time.
5. The proposed intermediate option would deliver additional regulator capacity to support the equivalent of an additional seven assessments, and 18 compliance reviews a year, plus a small number of systemic reports looking at system issues in depth. OSR would be able to develop campaigns and tools to embed standards, driven by our research and focused on prevention.
6. The Regulation Committee supported the proposed option and OSR's preference for an early agreement of the OSR budget to allow us to proceed with the proposed increase in staff with confidence and asked that this be put to the Authority Board for confirmation. The board are invited to consider the recommendation of the Regulation Committee.
7. Key regulatory activities since the last Board meeting include:
 - i. **The Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC):** at the Regulation Committee last week, we discussed the implications of the PACAC

hearings for OSR's new strategy. I identified a number of lessons, related to the clarity of our judgements as a regulator, and the importance of continuing to demonstrate that we are a rigorous regulator;

- ii. **OSR strategy:** we have continued to develop our thinking on our strategy. PACAC is one of several important inputs into our thinking. In our strategic thinking, we are increasingly mindful of retaining the perspective that ONS is just one of the producers we regulate, and we need to take a balanced and risk-based view across the system. This leads us to propose a strategy that is an incremental evolution as opposed to a radical change from our current approach; focusing on continuing to be a rigorous regulator, acting as a catalyst for system change, and supporting the integrity of evidence in the UK. We are refining the strategy internally and will continue to explore our ideas with external stakeholders, and share a draft strategy with the Regulation Committee in September;
 - iii. **State of the UK Statistical System 2025:** on 17 July we published our annual [State of the UK Statistical System 2025](#). Drawing on our work as the UK's statistics regulator, this report shares our views on the performance of the statistical system and the challenges facing it, highlights areas of progress and innovation and sets out our recommendations for advancing the system;
 - iv. **the adequacy of UK-wide comparable statistics and data:** on 27 June we published our [review of the adequacy of UK-wide comparable statistics and data](#). The review provides recommendations and a framework that will help the UK statistical system make the step change needed to deliver UK-wide comparable statistics and data on priority topics. Given the long-running and complex nature of this issue, our recommendations are challenging and will require careful thought and oversight to successfully deliver. But in our view, they are all necessary to drive the changes needed to address the issues highlighted in recent reviews and, importantly, meet the needs of statistics users. We are discussing our findings with the Inter Administration Committee (IAC); and
 - v. **assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice of Public Transport Statistics Northern Ireland:** on 30 June we published our [assessment of Public Transport Statistics in Northern Ireland](#) produced by the Department for Infrastructure (DfI). These statistics cover public transport operated by Translink, the main public transport provider in Northern Ireland, bringing together information on public transport journeys, vehicles and staff. DfI has already met the two requirements set out in this report and we have written to them acknowledging this.
8. **Refreshing the Code of Practice for Statistics:** following our presentation of Code 3.0 to the Authority Board in June, we are now resubmitting the Code for final sign-off from the Board, ahead of publication. The final version of Code 3.0 will be reviewed which takes on feedback from the Board, as well as other stakeholders. The Regulation Committee saw and approved this version on 21 July.

Casework

- 9. We have opened a further 13 cases since the June Authority Board taking our total for the year so far to 48. We closed our final outstanding case from 2024/25 causing an increase in the mean and median closure times by 1 to 23 and 13 for the year.
- 10. We have published four casework letters in this period, to NHS England and to Helen Morgan MP around claims about the number of appointments that the NHS app had prevented from being missed and the corresponding number of staff hours saved, and around comments about additional NHS activity. Other responses were to James Cartledge MP, about the costs associated with the Chagos Island Deal, and to Professor Jonathan Portes on measures of Gross Domestic Product per capita.

Engagement

- 11. External events:

- i. on 3 July, I spoke at our regular Annual Sector Accounts / Office of Communications / OSR joint workshop to share some key casework examples and our decisions which have taken place over the last few months; and
- ii. on 15 July, I represented OSR at the annual Royal Statistical Society awards event, and present the Voluntary Adoption Award to an organisation that has adopted the Code outside of the official statistics environment.

12. Issues on my mind:

- i. Developing OSR's strategy: we continue to evolve OSR's strategic thinking, alongside the Authority's own strategy. Giving due weight to the PACAC hearings – but keeping other stakeholders in focus – will be key. And I am conscious that I need to make sure the OSR team are engaged with, and supportive of, the direction we propose to take.

Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, OSR, 23 July 2025

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA25(39)

Reflections from Deputy Heads of the GSS on the Challenges and Opportunities for the Statistical System

Purpose

1. To discuss reflections from Deputy Heads of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) on the challenges and opportunities for the UK Statistical System.

Recommendations

2. Members of UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) are invited to discuss reflections from the three joint Deputy Heads of the GSS and to consider the challenges and opportunities in implementing [Strength in Numbers: A strategic vision for the GSS](#) and how the Board can support these efforts. Specifically:
 - iv. GSS leadership and governance;
 - v. prioritisation;
 - vi. strengthening the GSS community; and
 - vii. GSS capability and senior talent pipelines.

Background

3. In January 2025, three joint Deputy Heads of the GSS were appointed to support the National Statistician in leading the GSS and implementing its vision. These unfunded roles are voluntarily held by experienced Heads of Profession (HoP) alongside their departmental duties.
4. After six months there has been notable progress in implementing the vision. We will return to this, but much credit is owing to the ongoing commitment of GSS Heads of Profession and, we hope, the part we have been able to play (as Deputy Heads of the GSS) in providing portfolio leadership, oversight and communication. It was pleasing to see this progress recognised in the Office for Statistics Regulation's latest [State of the Statistical System](#) report.
5. As has been well discussed and documented, these months have also seen significant changes impacting the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and, therefore, statistical system at large. As well as exploring the potential for greater support and collaboration between the wider GSS and ONS, the GSS is also seeking reassurance from ONS that it will work to avoid unnecessary disruption (on the wider GSS) as it works through the next steps following the Devereux review, the separation of ONS Chief Executive and National Statistician and any recommendations from the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC).
6. By way of context, it is worth noting that the Government Statistician Group (GSG) is the largest profession within the Analysis Function, comprising 22.5 per cent. There are more than 3,800 professionally badged members of the GSG and 92 professionally badged members of the Senior Civil Service (SCS). The ONS, sitting at the heart of our system, employs around 12 per cent of the GSG and around a third (32 per cent) of the SCS.

Discussion

7. GSS HoPs are proud and passionate about what we deliver as a community and the progress made over recent months. The range of talent on show, for example, at both Civil Service Awards and Analysis in Government Awards is testament to the excellence, innovation and passion that exists across the system in the delivery of impactful statistics

that serve the public good. Indeed, as the tagline for our vision states, we are a community that shows real *Strength in Numbers*. We strive to work together, learn from each other, avoid duplication and maximise our collective impact.

8. Here we focus on four areas of challenge and opportunity, identified through our work to implement the GSS Vision.

GSS leadership and governance

9. Clearly, getting leadership and governance right matters hugely to the system at large. This is complex, both because of the many strategic and operational functions that need to be covered (including: policy, methods, international standards, people/professional matters) and the topical statistical and analytical themes which span organisational boundaries.
10. To this end, whilst we operate a de-centralised statistical model in the UK, it is the fact we are bound by common professional and recruitment/development standards - as well as the valued requirement to operate in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics – that means we can thrive together. Furthermore, our membership of the wider Analytical Function, also headed by the National Statistician, is of huge benefit in making optimal use of related skills and capability across government.
11. Whilst leadership occurs at all levels across the GSS, the ONS, as the National Statistical Office, plays a critical role.
12. Across the system, recent progress includes:
 - i. dedicated central resource within the ONS to support GSS-wide activities, strengthened GSS engagement in steering this work and an agreed model to ensure resource is sustainable;
 - ii. contributions via HoPs to the development of the Analysis Function Strategy and early thinking for a refresh of the Authority Strategy;
 - iii. refreshing the GSS membership of National Statistics Executive Group, including its shadow members – which is beneficial in supporting both the contribution of diverse views and development of our talent pipeline;
 - iv. launch of a task and finish group on GSS governance that is focused on:
 - whether our committee structure sufficiently supports the implementation of the GSS Vision
 - the effectiveness of our Champion networks (focused on issues such as quality, linkage, harmonisation and reproducible analytical pipelines)
 - the proposal for HoPs (which could potentially be extended to ONS SCS) to have an explicit objective that reflects their responsibilities towards cross-GSS initiatives.
13. The changes to the role of the National Statistician (about which we previously wrote to the Chair provides both opportunities and challenges for the leadership of the GSS. With a dedicated National Statistician, there is a refreshed opportunity to elevate the GSS and its impact across government. We would welcome the National Statistician having the breadth to provide leadership to the wider GSS and be a visible champion for statistics across the UK Government. It will be important to understand how the National Statistician and ONS Permanent Secretary will work together to provide consistent leadership for the whole of the GSS (which includes the ONS); and how the ONS SCS are supported and encouraged to provide active involvement in GSS leadership. We wait to support the new leadership and work to protect the investment to the GSS that has been made in recent months.

Prioritisation of work across the GSS

14. The [GSS Vision](#) sets out the ambition to implement improved cross-GSS topic collaboration and prioritisation, promoting a more joined-up and transparent approach to meet user needs and efficiently produce impactful statistics.
15. Recent progress has been made by launching a task and finish group to lead early thinking on a GSS-wide dissemination platform. We have also commissioned GSS Theme Groups (focused on specific topics) to develop and publish GSS workplans. In addition, owners for the four priority areas of user engagement, granular statistics, administrative data, and UK-wide coherence and harmonisation from the Statistics Assembly, have now been agreed (each comprising representation of one ONS and one wider-GSS lead). These leads have been tasked to provide system-wide leadership to the work on that topic.
16. There are concerns across the GSS that the current and necessarily rapid ONS prioritisation exercise will have significant implications for the wider GSS. Specific concerns include gaps where ONS work is de-prioritised. For example, where leadership and action for the important data sharing agenda will come from, in light of Integrated Data Service de-scoping and concurrent development of the National Data Library.
17. Theme groups and a focus on the Statistical Assembly priorities are part of our plan to be resilient and provide cross-cutting leadership on strategic priorities. Given the size, breadth and dispersed nature of the GSS it can be difficult to prioritise resource for this work over departmental objectives, particularly when budgets and resources are under pressure, so retained core support and leadership from ONS is vital.

Strengthening the GSS community

18. As referred to already, much of what makes up the GSS – particularly given its decentralised nature – is the sense of common standards, purpose and community. To this end, Deputy Heads of the GSS have given priority to raising the sense of community and breathing new life into the privileged positions held by government statisticians. As the proverb says, “it takes a village to raise a child”. We believe it takes the community of statisticians to raise the truth.
19. Recent progress includes:
 - i. commencement of GSS community calls (the first of which drew nearly 1,400 attendees) and new knowledge sharing sessions;
 - ii. launch of the regional community groups page, promoting local groups and activities;
 - iii. the introduction of a GSS Senior Leaders Blog in the monthly GSS newsletter, and the more comprehensive [Meet the GSS Senior Leaders](#) web page;
 - iv. the re-commencement of GSS induction which is seen as critical by HoPs to building an early sense of belonging to the GSS community; and
 - v. refreshed focus on diversity and inclusion activities.
20. Coming up, we look forward to:
 - i. a range of events to coincide with World Statistics Day in October 2025; and
 - ii. an across GSS in-person conference in November 2025.

21. There is also much more we want to do to aid the growth of collaborative working between ONS and the wider GSS. We see this as critical to both ONS and GSS.

GSS capability and senior talent pipelines

22. Recent progress includes close working with the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) on its “Future of the Statistician” initiative. This collaborative project between the GSS and RSS is exploring how the role of a statistician is expected to change over the next decade, what training and skills will be needed and what external factors will influence any

changes. We will investigate the role of the statistician to gain a better understanding of how to attract and retain talent and ensure the role is viewed as relevant and impactful.

23. This sits alongside discussions across the HoP community around senior talent pipelines; an issue raised also through the Devereux review. There is perhaps a greater opportunity here to involve Board members in the development of our talent management options, as well as hearing insights into their career journeys as an inspiration to current GSS leaders and as a means of setting expectations for our future.
24. This is all in addition to the ongoing excellent work of our voluntary groups, including our GSS People Advisory Group who work tirelessly to consider a broad range of people related policies and practices, covering everything from recruitment to skills and capability alignment with other analytical professions.
25. A key challenge there, for example, is the relationship between the GSS, Analysis Function and the Digital Data and Technology (DDaT) profession, where we see particular crossovers in respect of coding and the use of Artificial Intelligence/Data Science methods/techniques. Similarity, but separation of those overlapping skills has led to a lack of consistency around professional development and pay although we are in discussions to learn what has worked for DDaT that might also work for the GSS.
26. On senior talent pipelines, we are simply not doing enough to recognise and nurture statistical leadership talent across the GSS. There is talent in the system today and this should be further invested in to provide more home-grown leaders - particularly at the Director, Director General and National Statistician level – for the future. To this end, it is vital that we build on departmental practices and take a more orderly look at talent pipelines (perhaps through nine box grid style assessments and career development planning) with a view to growing future statistical leadership at scale.

Our asks of the Board

27. There are several important issues facing the GSS, most particularly centred on the matters of leadership and governance, prioritisation and the community. We would be grateful to hear the Board's view across these matters and thoughts on the following:
 - i. whether Board members would be willing to take a more active and visible role in inspiring the next generation of GSS leaders;
 - ii. whether there are means and opportunities to raise visibility of the Board to the whole of the GSS, such as through speaking events, seminars and conferences;
 - iii. how often we might provide updates on activities that demonstrate the collaboration between the future roles of the National Statistician, the UK Statistics Authority and the ONS;
 - iv. how to involve the Board in considering GSS priorities and options/mechanisms to tackle the ongoing tension between departmental and system-wide objectives. Can the Authority Strategy be a vehicle for providing this steer?; and
 - v. the Board's views on the future career offer for GSS statisticians alongside the senior talent pipeline and the interplay between the GSS, Analysis Function and DDaT, particularly in the area of data science.

Conclusion

28. These are times of seismic change for the GSS with new leadership structures presenting both significant opportunities and risks. Continuing to get the best from the whole GSS requires us to operate even more effectively together. Tendencies towards departmental siloes, whilst understandable in times of pressure and financial challenge, are also our biggest risk to effective implementation of the GSS Vision. It is through our people that we can continue to transcend those boundaries, making connections where needed, prompting innovation and avoiding duplication. Any system is only as strong as its weakest part. But all of a system can be inspired by its community. Wherever the challenges exist, we will achieve more if we continue to work together. We are excited by

the opportunities the future brings, the leadership we can provide to the GSS working with the Board.

Jason Bradbury, Jane Naylor, Steve Ellerd-Elliott, Deputy Heads of the GSS, July 2025

Update on the Economic Statistics Plan: July 2025

Purpose

1. An update to the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) on the progress made against the commitments set out in the Economic Statistics Plan (ESP).

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to:
 - i. note and comment against progress made in the ESP; and
 - ii. note the risks associated with delivery of the ESP and the current funding and resourcing picture.

Background

3. The ONS economic statistics plan, [Restoring confidence, improving quality: The plan for ONS economic statistics](#), was published on 26 June 2025 alongside the Devereux Review and [Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan](#). It sets out a five-year vision for:
 - i. sustainably improving the UK's core economic statistics as set out in ONS Priority Outcome Two (labour market, prices, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), trade and Balance of Payment, public sector finance); and
 - ii. implementing new International Macro-economic Statistical Standards (IMSS), including the next System of National Accounts (SNA25) and Balance of Payments Manual (BPM7).
4. Successful delivery of the Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan (SIEP), including the new Statistical Business Register, is a key dependency for the Plan.

Discussion

5. This Plan plays a key part in delivering ONS Priority Outcome Two and bringing the Board's new Strategic Risk Seven (SR7) (Quality economics statistics) back into tolerance through its focus on delivering end-to-end quality improvements for our core economic statistics.
6. The Plan is a live document. It will be updated annually to ensure it delivers its intended outcomes and meets the evolving needs of users and stakeholders.
7. Current progress on implementing ESP can be considered across three strands:
 - i. **Resourcing:** Ensuring people and budgets are released to deliver the Plan; this includes sufficient capability to ensure statistical production can be carried out sustainably, with increased focus on quality and continuous improvement;
 - ii. **Systems improvement:** Changes to the data, platforms, software and processes to improve statistical quality and reduce operational risk; this includes improvements to data collection, moving off legacy systems and greater use of end-to-end Reproducible Analytical Pipelines (RAPs); and
 - iii. **Delivery and assurance:** Developing governance, project management and assurance to provide the structure and accountability needed; this includes detailed implementation plans, aligning ESP milestones with Office for National Statistics (ONS) business plans, and establishing appropriate governance structures and assurance to ensure effective review, monitoring, challenge and decision-making.

Resourcing

8. Delivering the Plan requires additional human and financial resourcing. An Executive Committee (ExCo) Task and Finish Group identified significant resources which can be released to fund the plan from 2026/27 onwards. However, there are affordability challenges which need to be carefully managed in 2025/26, given the flat cash settlement and budgetary pressures.
9. **Funding:** In 2025/26, Economic, Social and Environmental Group (ESEG) has received a funding uplift to deliver the ESP; Business Surveys have received an additional funding for the ESP and SIEP. This is a welcome start, but not sufficient to safeguard delivery. The ESEG uplift in 2026/27 will be substantially higher and get us closer to the capacity needed to both deliver the Plan and sustainably staff core economic statistics teams (including continuous improvement). Funding constraints in supporting directorates remain a concern and, unless addressed, will impact our ability to deliver all elements of the Plan.
10. **Workforce:** Securing sufficient staff for the ESP remains a key challenge. Staff are being deployed from lower priority areas in ESEG and wider ONS, but this won't be sufficient to deliver the Plan due to a skills/grade mismatch. Accordingly, we are drawing on reserve lists and – where necessary – external recruitment to fill posts in our core economic statistics directorates. Government Statistical Service (GSS) loans and secondments are also being considered.

Systems Improvement

11. Many of the Plan's deliverables focus on building more resilient end-to-end statistical systems, including moving from reliance on legacy IT system. A key focus will be making our statistical production workflows reproducible by building RAPs where they don't yet exist. This will be reinforced by work in two key areas:
 - i. **Continuous Improvement:** Equipping production teams with the staff, skills and tools to implement incremental improvements systems and processes at modular, end-to-end pipeline, and statistical systems levels; and
 - ii. **Quality Excellence (QE):** Already successfully piloted, QE enables production teams to identify operational pinch points and areas for improvement. Plans are underway to embed this method in priority areas.
12. **Dependencies:** Successful implementation of the Plan relies on support from enabling areas, including the Data Science Campus, Economic Statistics Change, Digital Services, Data Growth & Operations, and Methodology & Quality Directorates.

Delivery and Assurance

13. **Planning:** Work to ensure a joined-up approach to delivery and maximising the impact of planned investments is in motion, with progress including an all-day planning workshop on 23 July 2025 and the development of a detailed implementation plan.
14. Further planning, coordination and delivery assurance work underway includes:
 - i. tracking progress through business-level Milestones, updated monthly;
 - ii. reviews with theme leads, clarifying detailed scope and end-to-end plans;
 - iii. finalising a detailed roadmap for sequencing and implementing the IMSS; and
 - iv. alignment with the SIEP, enabling functions, and major ONS programmes.
15. Looking ahead, we must incorporate key lessons learned from the Ambitious, Radical Inclusive Economic Statistics (ARIES) programme, including the Transformed Labour Survey/Labour Force Survey (TLFS/LFS). We need to foster a culture of honesty and openness where staff concerns are heard, guard against optimism bias through realistic timelines with built-in contingencies, maintain clear priorities whilst avoiding scope creep, and ensure robust end-to-end accountability with swift risk escalation.

16. **Governance:** All Priority Outcome Two statistical themes have programme/delivery boards and monitoring arrangements in place. An IMSS programme/delivery board is being established. Prices and labour market both have Stakeholder Advisory Panels; we are currently setting up a National Accounts panel. The National Statistician's Committee for Advice on Standards for Economic Statistics has provided advice and recommendations on the new statistical standards; this will continue as this work progresses.
17. Work is underway to establish a senior steering group to oversee ESP delivery. This is expected will include representatives from HM Treasury and the Bank of England. While ESP is not a formal programme, programmatic principles will guide delivery and accountability.

Conclusion

18. The ESP represents a critical step forward in delivering a modern, sustainable, and high-quality economic statistics system for the UK. While implementation of the Plan is well underway and good progress is being made across most 2025-26 milestones, there remain details to work out, dependencies to confirm and uncertainties to resolve. The next month or two will be pivotal in shaping detailed implementation of the Plan, establishing governance and assurance, and deploying staff into teams.
19. **Risks:** The two main current risks are whether we can secure sufficient staff to deliver the Plan, and the short-term funding gap facing ESEG and other areas, notably Methodology & Quality, this financial year. We expect to deploy significant numbers of staff in July and August and are tackling affordability constraints. Cross-ONS work to align resource allocation with core economic and population statistics will also help.

Grant Fitzner, Acting Director General, Economic, Social and Environmental Statistics Group, July 2025

Update on the Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan: July 2025

Purpose

1. An update to the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) on the progress made against the commitments set out in the Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan (IEP).

Recommendations

2. Members of the Board are invited to:
 - i. note and comment against progress made in the IEP for social and business surveys; and
 - ii. note the risks associated with delivery of the IEP and the current funding and resourcing picture.

Background

3. The IEP was published externally on 26 June 2025. It reflects the urgent need to address external challenges to the future of surveys and a wider strategic pivot within the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to sustain surveys into the future. Encompassing both business and social surveys, it outlines a significant set of activities to restore confidence in our survey operations, enhance data quality, modernise our systems and methods and enhance respondent engagement. This paper outlines progress, risks and issues for social and business surveys.

Discussion

4. The existing Business Surveys and Transformation, and Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) Programmes will provide the governance and first line assurance of programme level milestones within the IEP. Both report into the Executive Committee (ExCo) through the monthly Integrated Progress Report and a quarterly progress update against the plan will be provided to ExCo.
5. Some actions within the IEP fall under business level milestones and will be governed and assured through existing Directorate governance and assurance structures, for example, the new Social Survey Portfolio Board. Regular risk reviews against both business and programme level activity for social and business surveys are in place.

Social Surveys

6. This update follows the recent social survey quality and improvement activities briefing to the board (SA(25)(35)). In total there are 21 IEP actions for social surveys. Of these:
 - i. one is complete;
 - ii. ten are green, delivery is highly likely;
 - iii. five are amber, delivery feasible but with significant challenges;
 - iv. two are amber/red, delivery challenges with uncertainty associated with the recovery plan (both amber/reds are TLFS related and have been recently reported to the Board); and
 - v. three are not yet started.
7. Progress towards the main themes of the IEP is discussed below as well as any challenges we are encountering.
8. **Sustainable Field Operations:** Field interviewer headcount has increased by 156 since April 2025, however, due to attrition (reasons outlined in the IEP), this resulted in a net increase of 135. To date, we stand at a total headcount of 834 against a target of 1,023. Oversaturation of new interviewers in certain regions has created a challenge for

Interviewer Managers, increasing operational pressure. To address this, priority locations have been identified, and our external recruitment agency has been instructed to pause recruitment in the oversaturated areas. Following recent HM Treasury approval, the Interviewer Recognition project is being formally defined, and success criteria finalised, which will serve as a guiding framework throughout. An integrated project plan will be developed, in addition to embedding the correct assurance and evaluation frameworks. A likely go-live date will be confirmed as the project matures.

9. **Refreshed Citizen Relationship:** Phase One of a small-scale targeted communications pilot in Birmingham concluded in the Spring, with evaluation now underway. Findings will be shared by September 2025. Hard to reach groups, including ethnic minorities and young adults, present particular challenges. The next phase of research will be taken forward from September and will focus on understanding the challenges with these groups, and testing different ways of engaging with them.
10. **Improved Survey and Statistical Design:** A shortened TLFS Core was successfully launched in July 2025 and is currently performing as expected at this early stage. Further planned improvements this year include in-home supported completion. Plans to conduct a scaled test of 'search as you type' functionality for standard industrial classification are being considered for the TLFS Plus later this year. Data rotation is due to be implemented for the longitudinal sample of the TLFS Core in January 2026. The design and build of this remain on track for delivery.
11. **Technology:** Artificial Intelligence (AI) is being explored for dynamic question design, adaptive questioning, and feedback analysis. Recent public testing received positive feedback; however, implementation depends on successful integration with existing data tools. A prioritised research programme will be launched by the end of 2025 to support this.

Risks

12. The strategic risks for the successful implementation of the IEP for social surveys are:
 - i. Complex Data Capture – as recently reported to the Board on TLFS;
 - ii. Resource – following concerted recruitment effort in recent months, interviewer capacity has markedly increased by 50 per cent between April 2024 and June 2025, on track to meet the March 2026 target, but there is still risk that we will not be able to recruit enough interviewers in the timescales to meet our targets. Interviewer recruitment will remain a significant focus over the coming months; and
 - iii. Citizen Engagement – we are aware of the challenges around the time it will take to reframe the position of surveys with the citizen to improve survey uptake.

Funding and Resource Position

13. We have reforecast the budget this financial year and teams have the funding they require to deliver the work against each activity outlined in the IEP.
14. The total interviewer headcount has increased from 747 to 834 from April 2025, demonstrating a positive upward trajectory towards the target of 1,023. This leaves a remainder of 189 interviewers to be recruited by March 2026 to bring us up to 100 per cent capacity.
15. As of July 2025, there are 744 HQ (non-interviewer) posts in Social Surveys Directorate, with 572 filled (77 per cent), 59 staff currently being onboarded and a further 62 at various stages of recruitment. Further discussions are currently taking place on the remaining vacant posts with the anticipation of achieving 95 per cent capacity in HQ this financial year. Current delivery plans are scaled to existing and future resource levels and HQ resource is not at present a blocker to delivery.

Business Surveys

16. There is a plan on a page of IEP actions for business surveys with a RAG status and description of progress against all actions. In total there are 31 actions with either a business or programme level milestone. Of these 31 actions:
 - i. three are complete;
 - ii. eighteen are reporting green, delivery is highly likely;
 - iii. six are amber, delivery is feasible but with significant challenges; and
 - iv. four are red, delivery appears unachievable.
17. For all red actions and resulting milestones, we are working collaboratively with enabling areas across the organisation to find a route to green.
18. **Statistical Business Register:** Work on the Statistical Business Register (SBR) is advancing, with successful integration of Corporation Tax data and creation of the Financial Services Survey (FSS) sample, demonstrating our ability to generate stratified random samples. Coupled with sample selection for the Building Material Surveys we have proven the SBR can be used to select the two high-level sample designs used in Business Surveys.
19. The Business Indicators and Conditions sample is delayed due to complications with the FSS survey and is expected in August. Collaboration with Economic, Social and Environmental Statistics Group will identify further samples for SBR adoption.
20. Discussions are also underway on the integration of the SBR with downstream technology, such as the Statistical Preparation Platform (SPP). At this point it looks unfeasible to integrate the two platforms by the end of the financial year 2025/26, resulting in the objective of sampling surveys from the SBR, that have been successfully migrated to the SPP as in doubt. Work is underway to understand the resourcing needed, and the approach to integration with downstream systems. We will provide a further update to the board in due course.
21. **Legacy Technology:** We are exploring the removal of paper questionnaires and manual processes for the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) by March 2026, releasing an efficiency and cost savings. Deep dives have revealed extra complexity in processing, thus the replacement of end-to-end legacy technology for ASHE 26 is uncertain and currently assessed as red, delivery is unachievable.
22. We are working collaboratively with Digital Services to better understand the requirements of data processing as a matter of urgency, to find route to green for this important work.
23. We have successfully migrated the Producer Price Survey to online collection and the Services Producer Price Survey is on track for delivery in August. Work is underway to sequence the work needed for ASHE and the Import and Export Producer Price Indices.
24. We continue to make progress in moving the Monthly and Quarterly Business and Construction and Allied Trade Surveys to the Statistical Preparation Platform.
25. **Sustainable Operation:** The number of businesses included in the Account Management Unit (AMU) is expanding from 24 to 34 by August 2025, and we are continuing to target 500 businesses within the AMU and Large Cases Unit (LCU) by March 2026. The AMU model has increased response and on-time return rates. Sector-focused account managers are being recruited and trained. An innovation sprint will test digital solutions to streamline onboarding.
26. Efforts to develop talent and career paths in Business Data Operations Division continue, with training for new Administrative Officers and development of specialist roles in Finance and Labour Market Surveys. These initiatives aim to build a skilled workforce ready for evolving survey demands.

27. **Refreshed Business Engagement:** Novel non-response chasing initiatives for the ASHE survey are currently being tested, including the use of social media and Chief Executive Letters, for their inclusion in a revised non-response strategy for business surveys. The initiatives have proved successful in generating responses and we are assessing the quality of data returned.
28. **Improved Survey and Statistical Design:** An initial assessment of the questions and topics to be covered by the Integrated Annual Business Survey (IABS) has been concluded, and potential redundant questions in the current Annual Business Survey and Annual Purchases Surveys have been identified. These questions are now being discussed with stakeholders to understand their importance before a decision is made on their inclusion in the IABS.

Risks

29. All risks to delivery are reported on the risk register, with mitigating actions and owners assigned and regular reviews. Risks to delivery of the IEP, are as follows:
- i. Legacy Technology – our ability to understand the statistical methods used in legacy technology and how they have been applied, coupled with the tactical technology systems created to supplement legacy technology, present high-level complexity in understanding the requirements for the build of strategic solutions;
 - ii. Resourcing – support from enabling areas like Digital Services and Methodology and Quality Directorate is critical for delivering the IEP. Without prioritised resources, some milestones in IEP may not be met. We are collaborating with enabling areas to clarify requirements and align actions for better deliverability; and
 - iii. Resourcing – some security clearance delays are slowing the onboarding of external resource, and a three week pause by the UK Vetting Service on all applications may cause further impact. We are working with ONS security teams to consider using basic clearance to accelerate onboarding while safeguarding the organisation and its data.

Funding and Resource Position

30. The reallocation of the ONS budget through stopping or reducing non-core work, as stated in the Economic Statistics plan, provides the funding needed to deliver the commitments made in the IEP for this financial year.
31. To deliver the IEP and sustain business delivery, Business Survey Directorate needs to increase its full time equivalent from ~440 to 504. To date, we have been able to fill ten vacancies and are in the process of filling all others.
32. We have been able to utilise reserve lists across the Operational Delivery Analysis profession to fill roles in the AMU and LCU. In addition, a recent Administrative Officer recruitment campaign resulted in ~100 successful candidates, which will help us maintain capacity across core collection operations.

Conclusion

33. Progress is being made in across the majority of actions listed for social surveys. Tangible improvements are evident in field capacity and methodological innovation. As the activities accelerate, continued alignment with strategic priorities - particularly around data quality, inclusivity, and technological modernisation - will be essential.
34. Good progress is being made across a range of business survey actions, with some already completed and the majority of actions have a RAG status of green. Whilst the deliverability of some actions is in doubt, work is underway to understand the deliverability of these, and we will provide an update to the Board in due course.

**Kate Davies, Director, Business Surveys Directorate, and Alex Lambert, Director,
Social Surveys Directorate, July 2025**

People Update

Purpose

1. This paper provides a focused People update to the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board), framed within the context of our current and future delivery ambitions with specific consideration to our Strategic People risk:
 - **SR5 ‘Our People’:** *There is a risk that the UK Statistics Authority is unable to develop, deploy and retain individuals with critical skills and is unable to retain a diverse and inclusive pool of talent. When recruitment is required externally, the UKSA is unable to attract critical skills.*
2. At the request of the Chair of the Authority Board, this paper focuses specifically on whistleblowing and speaking up, with an emphasis on evidence relating to behaviours and other cultural indicators that underpin a healthy culture of speaking up. An update on wider Human Resources (HR) activity specifically related to mitigation, improvement and work in train relating to mitigation of Strategic Risk Five (SR5) and other strategic risks, presented to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) in June 2025, is available for the Board’s information.

Recommendations

3. Members of the Board are invited:
 - i. to note and comment on the progress made across the People agenda since the last paper to the Board in July 2024;
 - ii. note and comment on various strands on work undertaken to strengthen organisational culture, psychological safety, and colleague confidence in speaking up; and
 - iii. to provide any thoughts on where they would like the focus for future updates to be.

Background

4. Since the last People update to the Board in July 2024, the UK Statistics Authority (the Authority) has continued to strengthen its People agenda and actions in support of our organisational ambitions and the noted challenges to delivery within the organisation. This has included a renewed focus on culture, capability, and confidence and ensuring that our people practices remain aligned with the evolving needs of a modern, mission-focused Civil Service.
5. Key developments over the past year include:
 - i. launching a refreshed Speak Up and Raise a Concern Framework, designed to simplify processes, promote early resolution, and build confidence in raising concerns;
 - ii. advancing strategic workforce planning through a skills-led approach, with critical skills defined and refined in consultation with senior leaders with the current phase focusing on deeper understanding of analytical skills, the delivery of both the Core Statistics Plan and the Surveys Improvement and Enhancement Plan, as well as preparing for Census 2031;
 - iii. ensuring simplification and focus of resourcing effort to support delivery of the Core Statistics Plan. A new approach to interviewer recruitment to deliver the expected numbers required. Interviewer headcount has increased by 38 per cent since January 2024, to 836 interviewers, the largest interviewer cohort in the history of the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Headcount is expected to surpass 1,000 by the end of 2025;

- iv. introducing new tools and processes to enhance people insight, including a redesigned exit survey and a proposed new framework for People Management Information aligned to strategic delivery;
- v. investing in leadership and line management capability through the Empowerment Series, refreshed standards, and preparation for the launch of the Line Manager Development Tool, which will be initially available to 1000 colleagues this summer and then all colleagues from the autumn;
- vi. developing new approaches to skills related pay for our critical skills groups, notably analysts and interviewers; specialist pay for digital and data has been applied since 2022 and has delivered significant improvement in attraction and retention;
- vii. Chief Secretary of the Treasury approval for an interview incentive pay approach for implementation late 2025;
- viii. launch of the statistical analysis pathway and focusing the majority of corporate learning spend on critical skills development;
- ix. identification of our rarest deep analytical skills and development of a proposal to retain, deploy and develop those skills more effectively;
- x. achieving “best” practice in 97 per cent of criteria in the 2024 HR Functional Standards assessment, with no areas marked “in development”—a significant improvement from 2023; and
- xi. shortlisted in two categories at the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) Management Awards, for our Inclusion Interactive Experience: Best Employee Experience Initiative and Best Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Initiative.

Discussion

Whistleblowing and Speaking Up

- 6. In 2023, colleague feedback highlighted significant issues with the Resolution Policy, including lengthy processes and unnecessary complexity, and a need to improve user experience. In response, on 8 July 2024, the Authority launched its refreshed Speak Up and Raise a Concern Framework, redesigned for simplicity and clarity. The framework prioritises informal resolution to reduce timescales and provides enhanced resources to build confidence for colleagues when navigating concerns. Since the introduction of the refreshed framework, the number of reported cases has increased from 21 in 2023/24 to 40 in 2024/25, suggesting that colleagues feel more confident and empowered to speak up through this approach.
- 7. The Authority’s Whistleblowing and Raising a Concern Policy underpins this framework, offering clear guidance to ensure colleagues understand how to raise concerns and ensuring that the process is visible and accessible. The policy aligns with the Civil Service-wide model, which is underpinned by a clear legal basis and promotes consistency in how concerns are raised and addressed. Following discussion with the Chair of ARAC, the wording in the guidance will be made even clearer on alternative routes for raising a concern.
- 8. Examples of the type of concern that might be raised under this policy include (this is not an exhaustive list):
 - i. a threat to national security (for example, failure to follow security vetting procedures or falsifying documentation);
 - ii. theft, corruption or fraud (for example, dishonest or fraudulent conduct relating to payments or falsifying documents);
 - iii. failure to comply with legal obligations (for example, not protecting personal data as required by the Data Protection Act 2018, Gender Recognition Act 2004, Health and Safety regulations or any other relevant legislation); and
 - iv. danger to the environment or to people (for example, improper disposal of hazardous materials or abuse or mistreatment of children or vulnerable people).

9. Employees can also raise a concern about a breach of the core values of the Civil Service Code (the Code) (for example, if the employee has been required to act in a way that conflicts with the core values of honesty, integrity, objectivity or impartiality, or believes that another civil servant is acting, or has acted, in a way that conflicts with the Code).
10. This policy does not cover matters of individual conscience — such as when someone is asked to act in a way that conflicts with their faith or deeply held personal beliefs — where there is no indication of wrongdoing or breach of the Code. In such cases, individuals experiencing a ‘crisis of conscience’ are encouraged to speak with their line manager or another manager they feel comfortable approaching. If further support is needed, the appropriate route for colleagues is to raise the matter with a Nominated Officer who can provide guidance and help progress the issue appropriately.
11. To support a more nuanced understanding of colleague experiences, we recognise there are four distinct categories within the broader concept of speaking up:
 - i. whistleblowing: whistleblowing is raising concerns about serious wrongdoing (past, present, or future) within an organisation. In the Civil Service, this includes issues related to the Civil Service Code;
 - ii. speaking up: this is generally the reporting an incident of disrespectful or inappropriate behaviour, or someone being treated unfairly;
 - iii. speaking up and not feeling heard: where colleagues raise issues but perceive that their concerns are not acknowledged or taken seriously. This can erode trust and discourage future engagement with Speak Up mechanisms; and
 - iv. speaking up and feeling like nothing has changed: where colleagues feel their concerns were acknowledged but not acted upon. This can lead to disillusionment and a belief that speaking up is pointless, even when processes are followed.
12. These categories help us better understand the lived experience of colleagues and tailor how we should respond. They also reinforce the importance of not only listening but visibly responding to concerns — whether through action, explanation, or feedback — so that colleagues feel respected and valued. The importance of fostering a more open culture is explored throughout this paper.
13. Whistleblowing concerns may be raised either through the management chain or directly with one of the Authority’s ten Nominated Officers, who are located across our office sites. These officers are available for confidential discussions and can support colleagues in navigating the process, particularly where engaging with line management may not feel appropriate or safe. They are trained to help colleagues navigate the process, not to act as decision-makers or barriers. Concerns can also be sent in anonymously and have been managed in that way.
14. Our number of formal whistleblowing cases remains low — typically two per year, which is consistent with other departments of a similar size. While we do not record the number of informal conversations held with Nominated Officers, these interactions often represent the first and most critical step in surfacing concerns. They are not recorded to preserve confidentiality and trust.
15. Alongside Nominated Officers, the Authority has Respect Contacts and Mental Health Allies (MHAs). MHAs are trained volunteers who act as a point of contact if a colleague, or someone they are concerned about, is experiencing a mental health issue or emotional distress. They are not therapists or psychiatrists but can listen, give initial support, and signpost to further help if needed. To date, we have 47 MHAs, and a review of our MHA offer is ongoing including recruiting and training new MHAs, providing refresher training for existing MHAs, improving recording and monitoring to enable analysis of trends and metrics. Again, contacts made with MHA are kept confidential.

16. ONS adopts a no tolerance approach to bullying, harassment and unfair treatment at work. If colleagues experience this treatment, policies and processes are in place to support colleagues in reporting and taking action. If colleagues feel they would prefer to speak confidentially ahead of any formal processes, 15 Respect Contacts (RCs) are in place. This is a group of trained volunteers who provide initial one-to-one confidential support and advice, providing a safe space for colleagues to talk about their experiences and get advice on what options they have available to them. Between October 2022 and July 2025, records indicate that circa 40 referrals from MHAs were made to Respect Contacts. Further activity is planned to review our offering in line with the ongoing review of MHAs, including the improvement of reporting and monitoring of RC referrals, as insight suggests not all referrals have been recorded throughout this period.

Raising awareness

17. Within the Authority, we ensure awareness of the Framework and appropriate points of contact is sustained. Communication and engagement activities are delivered throughout the year to maintain awareness and understanding, including, but not limited to, the annual 'Speak Up' Week held each autumn. This event takes place across the Civil Service and is championed by a senior leader, with a coordinated programme of all-colleague communications and targeted learning interventions. These efforts are designed to reinforce a culture where speaking up is normalised and supported.
18. We have also ensured that our processes for raising concerns are visible and accessible, with a dedicated Speaking Up tab on the front page of the intranet and advertisement through a number of different internal channels. There is also coverage of the framework in induction for all new colleagues, and blogs and articles throughout the year. The main Speak Up intranet tab has been viewed 3,018 times since it was published in October 2024.
19. We are aware of other departments that have adopted similar leadership-led models. For example, the Home Office has a dedicated Speak Up lead within its internal communications team and runs an annual calendar of monthly themes, often sponsored by Senior Civil Servants (SCS). These themes are aligned with broader initiatives such as inclusion and diversity, with October typically focusing on Speak Up and inclusion messaging. This approach, and others across Government, are aligned with the model in operation in the Authority. We will continue to engage with other government departments to monitor how best practice develops and assess opportunities for further application within our own context.

Psychological safety

20. While formal procedures play a role, they represent only one aspect of an organisational culture that supports and normalises speaking up and raising concerns. Leadership behaviours across an organisation that foster psychological safety are critical at all levels, regardless of the mechanisms in place. The 2023 review of psychological safety within the SCS cadre, commissioned by ONS, highlighted both encouraging progress and areas requiring further attention.
21. Specifically, the report determined that there was a 'dysfunctional myth' that unwelcome news was not tolerated. Equally it found that there were some occasions where overly robust responses to such news had contributed to this being a widespread view. The report provided a range of recommendations including a focus on governance and decision-making, ensuring that issues were raised in a timely way and focusing on the quality of discussions amongst senior leaders. Since the release of the report, we have taken a range of actions:
- i. 14 'Empowerment Sessions' led by Directors General with small groups of Grade 6/7 colleagues;

- ii. started a monthly Monday Morning Colleagues meeting for all SCS and Grade 6/7 colleagues;
- iii. made significant changes to governance including the introduction of Executive Committee (ExCo), with a shadow board to provide clarity on decision-making and opportunity for more junior colleagues to be involved and voices to be heard and acted on;
- iv. minutes and vlogs of committees are shared, and members have the responsibility to cascade appropriately from committees;
- v. introduced Weekly Cascades to ensure information is being shared and colleagues have the opportunity to ask questions, provide input and challenge about activity right across the organisation;
- vi. launched a comprehensive learning series for G6/7s and all line managers to support them across all elements of ensuring an inclusive and safe environment;
- vii. launched in-person 'Chat with the National Statistician' sessions which are run on a location basis and open to all colleagues;
- viii. run regular 'One ONS' live events where key activities across the organisation are shared with colleagues, including opportunities for question and answer sessions;
- ix. embedded regular employee experience pulse-style surveys driven by key milestones, giving further opportunities for colleagues to feed in their views;
- x. created local level actions plans in each directorate to address key issues raised through the People Survey and employee experience surveys;
- xi. published Your Experience reports from various surveys including areas for development and strengths (the report was shared with the Board on publication in 2024);
- xii. appointed a senior Speak Up Champion, Emma Rourke;
- xiii. increased the number of Nominated Officers for whistleblowing concerns who include Directors, a Director-General and a Non-Executive Director;
- xiv. comments and responses on intranet publications;
- xv. launched the 'Viva Engage' platform for colleagues to exchange news, views and ideas;
- xvi. frequently championed the importance of speaking up from the National Statistician and other senior leaders in a wide range of forums;
- xvii. introduced a range of regular polls on sentiment and current events into Directorate and Group level calls;
- xviii. refreshed our Mental Health Allies group and due to commence a refresh of Respect Contacts – both groups have been in operation for a number of years and provide additional ways for colleagues to speak up and discuss issues confidentially; and
- xix. strengthened colleague networks that all have an SCS sponsor.

22. In addition to a range of activities already in existence prior to the report, this provides a comprehensive suite of activities and avenues for colleagues in addition to line managers, team leaders, senior leaders and the Board. Ultimately, psychological safety and a culture of speaking up must be collectively created by the leadership of the organisation at all levels and is sustained not by policy alone but by the quality of everyday communication and conversations within teams, awareness and ownership.

23. Whilst an open culture must be collectively created and sustained, enterprise leadership plays a pivotal role. By consistently modelling expected behaviours and values, the leadership team sets the tone for the organisation and must hold itself collectively and individually to account. Visible commitment to openness, accountability, and inclusion strengthens these principles and helps embed them into daily practice. Three of the Nolan principles are key for this and further embedding within our behaviours are essential: self-awareness, leadership and accountability.

24. We recognise evaluating progress and holding colleagues to account in this space is complex. While the annual People Survey provides valuable insights, it is not sufficient

on its own to assess the depth, consistency, or sustainability of behavioural change. We are therefore considering additional mechanisms to monitor progress more dynamically. At the SCS session on 22 July, we explored the core problem statement and identified collective actions required to address it. Further detail on this work will be presented at the Board.

25. An important aspect of fostering an open Speak Up culture is ensuring that colleagues feel heard and respected, even in cases where no wrongdoing is identified. In such instances, there is a risk that individuals may perceive processes as dismissive or unresponsive, potentially undermining trust in the system or individuals. Providing clear, empathetic, and constructive responses helps reinforce that concerns have been taken seriously, and that raising them contributes to a culture of openness and continuous improvement. This approach not only supports psychological safety but also encourages future engagement with Speak Up mechanisms.

Building Belonging project

26. The Building Belonging project was led by colleagues in People and Business Services in response to the People Survey results and organisational people data to support the ONS and UK Statistics Authority to curate and embed a culture in which our colleagues from an ethnic minority background feel they belong and to ensure we are at the forefront of diverse and innovative thought leadership when delivering statistics for the public good. The research is part of the wider Ethnicity Programme, led by People and Business Services who are working closely with the REACH (Race, Ethnicity and Cultural Heritage) network. The project helps to build rich insights into issues impacting the retention of colleagues from an ethnic minority background.
27. A wide range of people data was reviewed as part of the research, including recruitment and retention data and data on representation. Several focus groups were also conducted with ethnic minority colleagues. This research highlighted key areas that the organisation needs to address, including the experiences of exclusion and inequity that impact both colleagues and the representation of ethnic minority people in the statistics produced by the ONS and the Authority. This research was undertaken in 2024, and action has continued to take place since.
28. As part of the ongoing Ethnicity Programme work and sharing, SCS colleagues were engaged in the research during the Enterprise Leaders Away Day in June. This proved to be a thought provoking and powerful session. Colleagues took away commitments to share reflections with their teams and continue to drive quality conversations to improve employee experience. The outputs from the session will be taken forward, in collaboration with the REACH network, as part of a wider programme of work and inform the development of the next iteration of action planning within the Ethnicity Programme.

Current challenges

29. Cultural and morale challenges remain across the organisation, and recent developments — including the publication of the Devereux Review and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee hearings — have heightened concerns among some, but not all, colleagues. Some colleagues felt these recent events have focused disproportionately on shortcomings without recognising areas of strength. While teams are committed to maintaining enthusiasm, there is a clear need to foster an environment that restores energy and optimism. Creating space for balanced reflection — acknowledging both challenges and achievements — will be essential to restoring and maintaining engagement and confidence.
30. A cross-organisational exercise was undertaken with senior leadership grades (SCS, Grade 6 & 7) to identify and prioritise key cultural issues. The most frequently cited areas for improvement were: Trust in Senior Leadership, Leadership Culture, and Prioritisation & Funding. Colleagues in Communications and Digital Publishing are continuing to

monitor colleague sentiment on a weekly basis, which is being shared with organisational leadership weekly.

31. The latest colleague sentiment themes suggest the Authority is moving from open listening and organic ideas to a more structured consideration of the problems we want to solve and potential ways forward, in preparation for the new Permanent Secretary. A verbal update on colleague sentiment will be given to the Board.
32. Rebuilding trust for colleagues where they feel it has been lost and reforming our culture does not happen quickly and will require consistent and sustained effort by all leaders and more widely by all colleagues. Initiatives are already underway to better understand colleagues' concerns and ensure they feel heard. These include:
 - i. specific all-colleague calls;
 - ii. extended directorate sessions;
 - iii. q&a forums;
 - iv. a leadership-level working group has been established to explore cultural concerns in greater depth and to co-develop solutions that support a more open and collaborative organisational culture;
 - v. G6/7 sessions aiming to provide organisation-wide feedback on culture; and
 - vi. SCS workshop aiming to break down the broad concerns around culture into smaller, manageable components.
33. In addition to having an extended ExCo membership and reduction in other governance committees, we have increased working sessions with Directors and Directors General on cross-organisational priorities.
34. We are clearly at an inflection moment and although many of the cultural manifestations are not recent and not consistently felt, they are being amplified. Despite the challenges, progress has been made. Like most departments the annual People Survey is our key source of quantitative engagement data. The People Survey questions relating directly to cultural elements such as speaking up and psychological safety all showed net positive responses in 2024 as shown below:

B54. I am trusted to carry out my job effectively	0.85
B58. My organisation is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace	0.71
B07. I understand how my work contributes to my organisation's objectives	0.70
B55. I believe I would be supported if I try a new idea, even if it may not work	0.67
B56. In my organisation, people are encouraged to speak up when they identify a serious policy or delivery risk	0.64
B06. I have a clear understanding of my organisation's objectives	0.63
B57. I feel able to challenge inappropriate behaviour in the workplace	0.59

35. We continue to invest in leadership and management development to support colleagues across the organisation. Our offer includes clearly articulated Line Management Standards, a suite of leadership learning and development resources, and the Empowerment Series for our Grade 6 and 7 community. We are also working closely with the Government Skills Unit to support the upcoming launch of the Line Manager Development Tool, which will further enhance the visibility and accessibility of support for line managers. In parallel, we are going to take a fresh look at how performance is understood and evaluated across the organisation.

Hybrid working

36. Psychological safety requires a strong level of trust within a culture. Hybrid working has emerged as a key theme in this context. The Devereux Review also referenced the industrial dispute linked to this issue. It was frequently cited in People Survey comments as an area where trust has been eroded and came through in a decline in positivity in Leadership and Managing Change scores. The Devereux Review also referenced the industrial dispute linked to this issue.
37. The challenge stems from a shift in expectations: during the pandemic, many colleagues came to believe that remote working would remain the norm. While that belief was held in good faith, our approach had to evolve in line with the wider Civil Service. Because of this, the adjustment has been more difficult than in most other departments who are nonetheless still impacted.
38. We remain committed to a pragmatic and reasonable approach to attendance, consistent with the Civil Service position. But rebuilding trust requires more than policy, and it is essential there is visible, collective leadership alignment. While there is no evidence of direct operational impact from the challenges around hybrid working, the cultural impact is clear. It has affected trust in leadership, strained trade union relationships, and reduced opportunities for collaboration, connection, and informal learning.

Conclusion

39. We have made meaningful progress in embedding a culture where speaking up is normalised, supported, and acted upon. The refreshed Speak Up and Raise a Concern Framework, alongside a broader programme of cultural and leadership interventions, has begun to shift perceptions and increase confidence in raising concerns. The rise in reported cases under the framework — outside of formal whistleblowing — suggests growing awareness and trust in the mechanisms available. We have a range of mechanisms and activities to support and enable this.
40. Understanding the nuances of speaking up, and recognising this organisational inflection point, are key. Maintaining and building momentum requires collective effort in our clarity of purpose and mission and our daily interactions. Psychological safety is intrinsically linked to all of these things not through policy and initiatives alone; it must be reinforced through collective and individual accountability, responsibility and ownership, everyday conversations, transparent decision-making, and a shared commitment to openness and inclusion.

Philippa Bonay, Director for Operations, Chief People Officer, July 2025