

Simon Hoare MP  
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

*(By email)*

12 February 2026

Dear Simon,

In my letter to the Committee of 21 August, I committed to sharing a copy of the external Review of Board Effectiveness with the Committee once complete. I am pleased to append to this letter the completed Review, which took place over November and December 2025, and highlight key findings below.

I am grateful to Mo Baines, Interim Lead Non-Executive Director in the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Chief Executive of the Association for Public Service Excellence, who led the Review. The UK Statistics Authority Board discussed the findings with Mo at our meeting in December and the Board's action plan in response at our January meeting.

I would draw your attention to key themes in the Review, which were summarised as follows:

*“The scale of the ongoing challenges was well understood, and many examples given on positive changes throughout this transition period. The Board has navigated a number of personnel changes; is implementing the separation of roles; has challenged the Executive to act on issues of trust and culture within ONS and to complete the prioritisation work; and to be open in its reporting to the Board and the wider stakeholders. The Executive has got down to work on the recovery plan with energy and commitment, and the tide is beginning to turn in terms of external perceptions. Much has already changed for the better; and there was a clear appetite to continue improving on the outcomes for the Authority and its related bodies by both the Board and the Executive.”*

#### *Culture and behaviours*

The Review notes that in the past, papers were heavily managed before being shared with the Board. This has changed, with the Executive being open about issues and information; and the Board demonstrating curiosity and commitment to provide scrutiny and oversight. The Review commented that openness and

understanding is encouraged by the Interim Chair and the wider Board, and similarly reflected in the approaches and attitudes of the senior executive leaders and the wider team. The Executive is increasing its transparency and welcomes this increased level of scrutiny.

#### *Non-Executive Director (NED) skills*

There was a delay to NED recruitment in 2024, which the Review found had a tangible impact on Board expertise, particularly in areas of communications and audit. With new NEDs in place since February 2025, the Review notes this has had a positive and growing impact since then. The Review highlights the Board would benefit from increased capacity, as well as enhanced, specific experience of large-scale transformation and change in the private sector, and macroeconomics.

#### *NED engagement*

The review identified the importance of involvement of NEDs outside of the formal meetings. NEDs have already been providing high-level support to the Executive, including on development of approaches to risk and assurance, communicating openly and transparently, and the development of the economic statistics and survey improvement plans. A new sub-committee on population statistics system has also been set up. The Review encourages us to go further, subject to NED capacity.

#### *Governance*

The Review found that Board agendas had been understandably but disproportionately focused on Office for National Statistics (ONS) major programme delivery. It highlights that improvements are already being made to tighten focus on business as usual. For example, the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Chair has instituted deep dives across the work of the ONS. This, together with strengthened ARAC membership, has led to a strong focus on audit and realistic assessment of risk.

For Regulation Committee, the involvement of NEDs has led to successful encouragement of the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) to be clearer and more direct in their assessment recommendations.

The Review discussed possible formal governance structures to strengthen the oversight of the ONS further. The Board are open to what the right governance structure looks like in the long-term, but with recovery underway believe that it should reflect on this once it receives your report, and to await the arrival of the permanent Chair.

#### *Prioritisation of Board Agendas*

The Review found that Board agendas were also disproportionately focused on the ONS rather than system-wide issues. Recognising this, we have engaged much more strongly with the Government Statistical System (GSS) and Chief Statisticians

in the Devolved Governments to ensure the statistical system is reflected in its entirety in Board agendas.

### *Quality of papers and management information*

The Review highlights that previously information to the Board was not openly shared. Now, new senior leaders within the ONS are keen to ensure transparency; although this has led to a potential overcorrection with longer papers. We are working towards shorter papers with clear options.

### *Next steps and conclusions*

In conclusion, we are already in a much stronger position than a year ago. The Board is strengthened with its newest members; we are strongly scrutinising and supporting the work of the ONS Executive, supported by our sub-committees, including the newest focusing on the Census and wider population statistics system. We are engaging strongly with the wider GSS. And while not the focus of as much external comment, OSR's updated strategy sets out how, encouraged by the Board, it will be more direct in its assessments, and thorough in its follow ups.

Transformation of the ONS itself is well underway under the strong leadership of Darren Tierney. There have been excellent senior appointments, clear prioritisation, and a welcome transparent approach to working, both internally and externally.

While recovery of economic statistics and survey performance is in progress, it is at an early stage, and inevitably fragile. Much of the work to be done is complex, and requires testing things out, which will not always be successful first time. Success depends on everybody, and we are also conscious how important senior leaders are, and the pressure on them.

So, while things are calmer than a year ago, we are under no illusions about the scale of the task ahead, and the Board will work hard to implement the recommendations of the Review. This will include:

- Working with the Cabinet Office on NED recruitment, to ensure a rich skillset
  - A programme of deep dives and engagement beyond Board meetings
  - Building on the redesign of management information already underway
  - Strengthening guidance and templates on Board papers
- Revisiting governance once we have an incoming permanent Chair, and your Committee's recommendations.

We will also continue to support and scrutinise the work of ONS recovery plans, as well as culture and people, technology and census preparations.

The appointment of a permanent National Statistician is well underway, with final interviews to be completed in mid-March. We have arrangements in place for the work of the National Statistician's Office and the responsibilities of the National Statistician in the meantime. Once the permanent appointment is made, we look forward to the timely restarting of the Chair recruitment.

I am also aware that you are expecting a copy of the updated framework agreement between the Cabinet Office and the UK Statistics Authority; the Authority's comments on which have been returned to the Cabinet Office. I hope that a copy can be shared with you very soon.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Penny Young". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the "y".

**Penny Young**  
**Interim Chair**