

## ***ONS Social Survey Strategy: Draft Scope for MARP Review***

### **Purpose**

1. The purpose of this paper is to seek the views of the Methodological Assurance Review Panel (MARP) on the proposed scope for an ONS Social Survey Strategy, as part of external assurance. The paper sets out the background and strategic context for social surveys, the proposed scope and boundaries, and the key questions the strategy will address.

### **Recommendations**

2. Members of MARP are invited to:
  - i. Share their views on the proposed scope, boundaries and key questions
  - ii. Highlight any gaps or areas that may have been overlooked
3. Noting that while all feedback is valued and will be considered, not every view can be reflected in the scoping paper or final strategy document; the ultimate decision rests with members of ONS's Executive Committee.

### **Background**

4. ONS has a long-standing role in delivering high-quality surveys, and it is widely recognised that, for at least the next decade, they will remain central to providing the evidence base.
5. In 2024/25, ONS produced a draft Survey Strategy covering all social and business surveys. Extensive engagement ensured views from across the end-to-end operation and senior leadership team were captured. The intention was to publish this strategy, setting out a new vision for surveys alongside a set of specific actions under key strategic themes, aligned with business planning requirements for 2025/26. However, wider contextual developments – including the OSR's systemic review of ONS economic statistics, the Devereux Review, recent scrutiny by PACAC, and an increased organisational focus on survey recovery and capability – led to the repurposing of the strategy into a dedicated recovery plan for surveys.
6. In June 2025, ONS published the [Survey Enhancement and Improvement Plan](#), building on the [Economic Statistics Plan](#), to address immediate challenges in social survey delivery. This plan is time-bound for the 2025/26 financial year.
7. A long-term approach is required to ensure social surveys remain robust, relevant, and capable of supporting the nation's key social and economic indicators. We need to move beyond recovery towards sustainability. To this end, ExCo has formally commissioned a refreshed vision for ONS social surveys, with a scoping paper to be prepared and discussed in January 2025.

### **Discussion**

8. While surveys have long been a focus within ONS, the landscape has, and continues, to evolve. We now have an opportunity to set a bold vision and provide clear direction for social surveys over the next five years. Initial engagement has highlighted that the strategy must clearly define what is in and out of scope and address several key questions (outlined below).

### Scope and Boundaries

9. We propose a dual-track strategy: a five-year long-term vision, setting direction and ambition through to Census 2031, shaping how the Census will redefine the survey landscape. In parallel, this will be underpinned by a three-year strategic roadmap aligned with the Spending Review period to drive near-term impact and ensure accountability.
10. The road map will inform a refresh of the original Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan, outlining specific actions to improve survey quality. We will review delivery progress against the vision and plan for the final two years accordingly.
11. The strategy will cover all surveys of households and individuals owned by ONS, irrespective of their current Directorate and/or whether they are delivered by an external partner. This includes:
  - iii. Labour Force Survey
  - iv. Annual Population Survey
  - v. Transformed Labour Force Survey
  - vi. Wealth and Assets Survey
  - vii. Living Costs and Food Survey
  - viii. International Passenger Survey
  - ix. Opinions and Lifestyle Survey
  - x. Crime Survey for England and Wales
  - xi. Health Insight Survey
12. Business surveys are out of scope.
13. The focus will be on all aspects of survey capability, including user requirements, statistical design, technology, collection capability, integration with alternative data sources, data processing, and people – ensuring alignment with all other ONS corporate strategies (e.g., ONS Data Sources Strategy).

### Key Questions

14. Through the process of developing the strategy, several questions will need to be addressed to inform the future direction of social surveys. We propose the following:
  - i. Should ONS consider delivering social surveys beyond its current social survey commitments?
  - ii. Should ONS have a role in supporting or delivering social surveys for other government departments?
  - iii. How can ONS modernise its social survey data collection operations?
  - iv. Should ONS peruse mandating social surveys?
  - v. How do social surveys support population and characteristic data in a potential post-census world?
  - vi. Should ONS explore moving from theme-based surveys (e.g. Labour Force, Wealth and Assets etc.) to a more integrated design around specific modes of interviewing respondents (individual level survey, a household survey), taking a respondent centred design and incorporation of other types of data with survey data?

- vii. What future capabilities and skills should ONS develop to maintain excellence and innovation in social survey delivery?
- viii. What governance model will best support strategic oversight and accountability for social surveys across ONS?
- ix. Are ONS structured organisationally in the best way to enable sustainable delivery of high-quality social surveys?

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