

---

**James Benford** | Director General for Surveys and Economic Statistics Group

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

15 April 2026

Dear Mr Hoare,

Today the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published our second quarterly progress update on the Economic Statistics Plan (ESP) and Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan (SIEP)<sup>1</sup>, together with an update on the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS)<sup>2</sup>.

The past quarter has seen further tangible improvements to the quality of our economic statistics and a fall in the number of major errors made. We have implemented some of our most impactful changes, such as introducing scanner data into consumer prices, further improving responses to our household and business surveys, laying the groundwork to adhere to the highest tier of statistical dissemination standards and moved more of our processes off legacy systems. We have also implemented the final set of agreed design changes for the TLFS.

Response levels on the Labour Force Survey (LFS) have shown clear improvement, with all waves now close to their pre-pandemic levels, significantly strengthening the quality of, and confidence in, core labour market outputs. On the TLFS, the short Core Survey continues to improve response quality by reducing partial household responses and increasing the number of fully responding individuals.

The timing of transition to the TLFS for headline labour market statistics remains an evidence-led decision. The first readiness assessment, conducted in collaboration with our main users, is scheduled for July 2026 — a key milestone that will provide critical insights to inform next steps. At the readiness assessment, only one calendar quarter of data

---

<sup>1</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/ourstrategyandplans/onsimprovementplans/onseconomicstatisticsandsurveysimprovementplan/onseconomicstatisticsandsurveysimprovementplanquarterlyprogressupdateapril2026>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/labourmarkettransformationupdateonprogressandplans/april2026>

reflecting the latest set of design changes will have been collected, allowing for only a limited assessment of their impact.

Given the limited data availability, further data collection and assessment will be needed, meaning the earliest transition of headline labour market statistics has shifted from November 2026 into 2027. A 2027 transition has always been part of our scenario planning and is considered the most likely outcome.

The July readiness assessment will inform final design decisions, future publication plans and the timing of the next readiness review, which will be no later than January 2027. We recognise this has wider implications for our capacity to improve other statistics, given the resource burden of running two labour force surveys in parallel, and we are managing this actively.

Stepping back, the breadth, scale and complexity of what we set out to achieve in the ESP and SIEP was considerable - and delivery experience has sharpened our understanding of that. Over two-thirds, 65 of the 93, milestones planned for 2025/26 have been delivered. The remaining third have proved more complicated and difficult to achieve than anticipated, reflecting a mix of system integration challenges, the time taken to mobilise required resource, the complexity of sequencing transformation at pace, and competing demands including preparation for Census 2031.

As we conclude our corporate business planning for 2026 to 2029, we are re-balancing our portfolio to protect delivery of the work that matters most. We are introducing a structured "waiting room" approach — a transparent way of sequencing change activity and holding it safely until we have the capacity and readiness to deliver it well. This is a deliberate, strategic choice. We are choosing realism over ambition to protect delivery confidence in the most critical improvements.

Our immediate focus is on five priorities: sustainable delivery of our economic statistics, setting up our people for success; addressing quality issues, drawing on a new tiering framework that prioritises improvements to statistics underpinning critical decisions; transitioning to the TLFS; delivering the Statistical Business Register, which is critical to improving coverage of smaller businesses and laying the foundation for updated industry classifications; and establishing our programme to implement new international macroeconomic statistical standards.

We will publish the next quarterly update in July 2026, aligned with the outcomes of ONS business planning for 2026-2029, keeping you and other key stakeholders informed.

I am copying this letter to Chair of the Treasury Committee, Dame Meg Hillier MP.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J Benford', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

**James Benford**