UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Minutes

Thursday, 1 May 2014
Boardroom, London

Present
UK Statistics Authority
Sir Andrew Dilnot (Chair)
Professor David Rhind
Professor Sir Adrian Smith
Dame Colette Bowe
Mr Partha Dasgupta
Ms Carolyn Fairbairn
Dame Moira Gibb
Professor David Hand
Mr Ed Humpherson
Dr David Levy
Ms Jil Matheson
Mr Glen Watson

Secretariat
Mr Robert Bumpstead
Mr Joe Cuddeford

Apologies
None

Other Attendees
Ms Laura Dewis and Mr Guy Goodwin (ONS, for item 7)
Mr Dave Elliman and Mr Alistair Smith (ThoughtWorks, for item 7)
Ms Kate Barker and Mr Art Ridgeway (National Statistics Quality Review of National Accounts and Balance of Payments, for item 8)
Mr Joe Grice (ONS, for item 9)

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 Chair reported on the topics discussed at the Non-Executive Session that had taken place prior to the start of the meeting. The Non-Executive Directors had discussed the National Statistics Quality Review on National Accounts and Balance of Payments, governance of the UK Statistics Authority and ONS, the ONS website, and the appointment of the next Authority Chief Executive.

3.2   The minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 March 2014 were agreed as a correct record.

4.   Authority Chair's Report
4.1   The Chair reported on his recent activities, which included:

   i.   giving the keynote address at the inaugural Roger Jowell Memorial Lecture, organised by the National Centre for Social Research and the Social Research Association;
   ii.   recruitment of the next Chief Executive of the Statistics Authority; and
   iii. attending the Steering Group for the Monitoring Review on the use of deflators in official statistics publications.

5.   Reports from Authority Committee Chairs

   Administrative Data Research Network Board

5.1   Professor Hand reported on the inaugural meeting of the Administrative Data Research Network (ADRN) Board. An induction session had been held, covering the background to the ADRN, an overview of the Network, and recent research on the public's views on using administrative data for research purposes. The Board had considered its Terms of Reference, key strategic issues which could demand early attention from the Board, the branding and communications strategy for the ADRN, proposals for principles and policies for the Network, and a draft management report.

   Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

5.2   Mr Dasgupta reported on the meeting of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on 28 March. The Committee had considered the information technology (IT) strategy for ONS, which would be refreshed in the autumn of 2014; a review of IT risks; the draft Value for Money programme; a report on the organisation's financial maturity produced following a review by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA); three internal audit reports; and the proposed strategy for internal audit assurance work for 2014/15.

6.   Governance [SA(14)14]
6.1   The Board deferred consideration of governance to its next meeting.

7.   Web Assurance [SA(14)15]
7.1   Mr Goodwin introduced a paper which provided findings from the assurance work following recent difficulties with deploying a new subject taxonomy to the ONS website.

7.2 Mr Elliman provided an overview of the external assurance work that the company, ThoughtWorks, had conducted on the ONS website. ThoughtWorks had identified the specific cause of the problem with the taxonomy implementation, but had also identified wider issues with the website and digital capability at ONS more broadly.

7.3 Ms Dewis provided a presentation about the implications for future work, including the risks associated with any further developments to the website and the options for creating a new website.

7.4 The Board agreed that a paper would be presented to the next meeting covering the medium term strategic options for the website.

8.   National Statistics Quality Review National Accounts [SA(14)16]
8.1 Ms Barker and Mr Ridgeway introduced a draft of their National Statistics Quality Review (NSQR) on National Accounts and Balance of Payments.

8.3 As part of its programme of NSQRs, ONS had invited Ms Barker and Mr Ridgeway to review the user needs and methodology underpinning the National Accounts and Balance of Payments. The review began in September 2013 and a draft report had now been prepared. Plans for publication of the report were being finalised.

8.4 The Board welcomed the draft report, discussed the draft findings, and thanked Ms Barker and Mr Ridgeway.

9.   European System of Accounts 2010
9.1 Mr Watson and Mr Grice provided an update on upcoming changes to National Accounts methodology.

9.2 ONS planned to make changes to its National Accounts methodology in time for the publication of the quarterly National Accounts and Balance of Payments on 30 September 2014, and the publication of the Blue and Pink Books in October 2014. The Board heard that the changes had been announced on the ONS website in November and had been discussed at a public meeting on 7 April, attended by financial commentators, business economists and journalists.

9.3 The Board agreed that it would be crucial to ensure that the methodology changes were appropriately communicated to users so that their effects on time series could be understood. It was essential that sufficient supporting material was published so that users could understand whether changes in the time series were due to either the methodology changes, or real changes in the world.

10.   Pre-release access reduction [SA(14)17a]
10.1 The meeting deferred consideration of an item on ONS pre-release access reduction to its next meeting.

11.   Any other business
11.1 There was no other business. The meeting concluded at 16:10. The Authority Board would meet next on 5 June 2014 at 12:00 in London.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Agenda

Thursday, 1 May 2014
Board Room, London, 12:00 – 16:00

Chair: **Sir Andrew Dilnot**
Apologies:

1	Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings Declarations of interest	Meeting of 250314
2	Authority Chair's Report: • Economic Statistics • Website and Communications • Recruitment	Oral report Sir Andrew Dilnot
3	Reports from Authority Committee Chairs: • Administrative Data Research Network Board • Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	Oral reports Professor David Hand Mr Partha Dasgupta
4	Governance	SA(14)14 Sir Andrew Dilnot
5	Web Assurance	SA(14)15 Mr Glen Watson Mr Dave Elliman Mr Alistair Smith
6	National Statistics Quality Review of National Accounts	SA(14)16 Ms Kate Barker Mr Art Ridgeway
7	European System of Accounts 2010	Oral Report Mr Glen Watson Mr Joe Grice
8	Results of the Pre-Release Access Minimisation Exercise	SA(14)17a Mr Glen Watson
9	Any Other Business	

Next Meeting: **Thursday 5 June 2014, London, 12:00 – 16:00**

Tab 1 Governance

1

SA(14)14 – Governance

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(14)14

Governance

This agenda item is to be considered at the UK Statistics Authority Committee meeting on 5 June 2014.

Tab 1 Governance

Tab 2 Web Assurance

2

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(14)15

ONS Website - Findings of the Assurance Work

Purpose
1. This paper provides the findings from the assurance work following the difficulties with deploying the new subject taxonomy to the ONS website.

2. A short presentation will be given at the meeting looking at the implications for future work, including the risks associated with any further developments to the website and the options for creating a new website.

Recommendations
3. Members of the Authority Board are invited to discuss the findings of the assurance work and to agree:

   i.   to draw a line under investigations into the taxonomy deployment problem, allowing resources to be focused on any future deployments and/or the creation of a new website;
   ii. the extent to which they would wish to see investigations continue into improvements that can be made to stabilise the existing site, given advice from ThoughtWorks;
   iii. that no further assurance work on the Improving Dissemination Programme (IDP) - specific governance and programme management should be undertaken. ONS should instead focus on delivery of the issues highlighted in paragraph, including bringing forward its digital strategy, recruitment of a Chief Digital Officer and confirming the governance of its digital agenda more widely; and
   iv. that work should continue on the additional strategic questions identified. In particular, the results of the information technology capability health check should be taken to the ONS Board at the earliest possible opportunity.

Discussion
4. The background to the problems with the taxonomy implementation, along with the assurance work being undertaken, was described in paper SA(14)08 and discussed at the March meeting of the Authority Board.

5. The full ThoughtWorks report will be available to members in the week beginning 28 April. The latter will be a very detailed document designed to provide ONS with what we need to move forward, as well as to provide assurance to the Authority Board. We have invited the ThoughtWorks lead investigator to attend the 1 May Board meeting so that Board members can ask him any questions on their assurance work.

6. In summary, since the March meeting, we have definitively identified the cause of the problem with the taxonomy implementation (Release 2.4). The main purpose of Release 2.4 was to deploy the code for the new taxonomy as part of the Improving Dissemination Programme. However, due to the limited availability of deployment windows, some critical "business as usual" fixes were also included in Release 2.4. One of these critical fixes was a small fix intended to strengthen the security of the site. Investigations uncovered that an error was introduced into the XML template which contained the security fix. The Tridion code depended on a Java component to run in a way that it had not been fully designed to support and there was no safety net of tests to catch the error before being released. This error, over time, caused incremental memory consumption which ultimately led to the site suffering performance issues. This was not picked up during performance testing because the tests were only run for a couple of hours. Due to the complexity of the site architecture and the discrete nature of the IT development

Tab 2 Web Assurance

teams, there was not enough understanding of how the different components could impact each other. If the Tridion and Java development teams had a shared understanding of the impact of changes to different components making up the site, it is ThoughtWorks' view that the problems with the taxonomy implementation would not have happened. Once the source of the problem was identified, ThoughtWorks worked with members of the ONS IT team suggesting tools and types of analysis that would rectify the problem. A solution was put in place on several local testing environments and the impact was analysed. A clear improvement in performance was noticed, leading the investigators to conclude they had isolated the problem and could fix it in the test environment.

7. While finding the cause is good news and reduces to a degree the uncertainty that we are dealing with, ThoughtWorks also concluded, as we suspected, that it is a symptom of a wider and much bigger problem with the website, how it is constructed, as well as our IT maturity and capability in the digital / website space. As a consequence, the risks that we were running with in the taxonomy implementation, as well as other implementations, are higher than we had anticipated and were mitigating for. The existing website risks have been and are being revisited in the light of this. This wider problem is crucial because it implies that we cannot be sure that the ONS website is safe to deploy code to and there remains uncertainty around the level of risk that we are running with if we try to do so. This is because of the complexity in how it has been built and the limitations in how it is supported (and has been supported since 2011 which implies that other code errors may be present). The approach to testing needs to change to give us confidence in deploying code but, because tests should be created at the time of creating the software, this is difficult to retrofit. Any improvements we can make retrospectively will only give us limited additional reassurance.

Guy Goodwin (Senior Responsible Owner)
Laura Dewis (Programme Director)
Improving Dissemination Programme, 24 April 2014

Tab 3 National Statistics Quality Review of National Accounts

SA(14)16 – National Statistics Quality Review of National Accounts and Balance of Payments.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(14)16

National Statistics Quality Review of National Accounts
and Balance of Payments

This document will be published on the Office for National Statistics website in due course.

The document will be available at:

http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/quality/quality-reviews/index.html

Tab 3 National Statistics Quality Review of National Accounts

Tab 4 Results of the Pre-Release Access Minimisation Exercise

SA(14)17a – Results of the Pre-Release Access Minimisation Exercise

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(14)17a

Results of the Pre-Release Access Minimisation Exercise

This agenda item is to be considered at the UK Statistics Authority Committee meeting on 5 June 2014.

4