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**Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation**

Siobhan Carey

Chief Executive and Registrar General

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency [by email]

 18 October 2019

Dear Siobhan

**OSR Review of the Public Value of Devolved Public Finance statistics**

OSR recently concluded [a review](https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/public-value-of-statistics-on-public-finances-in-a-devolved-uk/) of the public value of public finance statistics for the devolved administrations (DAs) and the regions. The complexity of new fiscal frameworks and the associated need to make public finance statistics for the DAs and the regions more easily understood was one of the factors that prompted us to conduct our review. We welcomed the input your colleagues provided to this review.

We undertook the review in two parts, the first focused on the coherence and transparency of devolved public finance statistics and the second focused on statistics on public sector investment for DAs alone. The outputs from the review are all available on our website and linked via the associated [blog](https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/steps-towards-transparent-fiscal-statistics/) we published. The review also helped to augment an assessment we conducted of HM Treasury’s Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis: [Country and Regional Analysis statistics](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/country-and-regional-analysis-2018) and the assessment report can be found at [this link](https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/statistics-on-government-spending-country-and-regional-analysis/). We hope that in enhancing the public spending statistics, HM Treasury will significantly improve the public value of these statistics which will benefit users in the DAs.

We found that ONS produce useful and plentiful data on public finances in the DAs and the regions but there is room for greater insights from the data. We recommended that statisticians in the DAs and ONS work together to develop more compelling narratives from the data through designing presentation to suit the internet and deploying better platforms to present other parties’ analysis using ONS data after release. I know that ONS has started that discussion with the DAs and others and we would be very grateful for any assistance that you and your colleagues could offer to ONS in implementing this recommendation.

In a second phase of the review we focused particularly on statistics on public sector investments for the DAs; we published the findings in a second presentation and a link can be found [here](https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Public-Value-Devolved-Public-Finance-Statistics-Part-2.pdf). Generally, across the DAs we found a mixed response to introducing better public sector investment data in the different nations. We found little interest in publishing analysis based on such data in Northern Ireland, although we did find it difficult to find bodies who expressed an interest in this kind of analysis.

Generally, those we spoke to across the DAs who were familiar with this data advised against simply putting the data into the public domain without careful presentation and comment, fearing it would risk misinterpretation and/or apathy. Overall, we took the view that within the next five years DAs should consider developing statistics and data to illuminate how government assets and liabilities have a significant impact on wellbeing. But we also counselled that before DAs made such data available, they should consider how best to develop a community of interest with bodies interested in how devolved finance can sharpen people’s understanding of how public assets lead to improved living standards.

I would welcome your feedback on our review and would be really interested to hear your take on the development of such statistics in Northern Ireland over the medium term, ideally by the end of November, if possible.

I am copying this letter to Philip Wales, Deputy Director Public Sector Division at ONS and Tom Orford, Head of Statistics Profession at HM Treasury.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson

Director General for Regulation