

## **POST-ELECTION BRIEFING: BETTER DATA FOR INFORMED, TRANSPARENT DECISION- MAKING**

### **RSS Manifesto ask**

The new government to direct government departments to improve data sharing and report regularly on their progress and, within the first 100 days, to set out plans to support the UK's data infrastructure.

### **Summary**

Government holds a great deal of information about its citizens that could be used to improve service delivery, better inform decision-making and make efficiency savings. However, there are a wide range of cultural and technical challenges that are currently preventing effective data sharing. Addressing these barriers requires direction from the centre of government to help drive a change of culture in departments. It is also important to ensure that the UK's data and statistical infrastructure is properly supported so that it can make full use of improved access to data and new technologies.

### **What's the problem?**

Government departments and the wider public sector hold a great deal of data about individuals and the state of the nation. To unlock the full potential of this data, it is important that there is an effective system of data sharing among different parts of the public sector. Doing so can:

- Improve service delivery by enabling an improved understanding of citizen's needs and preferences.
- Better inform decision-making by combining data from different sources – enabling analysts to provide deeper insights on issues that are often complex and multifaceted.
- Improve efficiency and reduce costs by reducing duplication of datasets in different parts of the public sector.

However, government departments are currently not effective in sharing data with each other. The challenges in this area have recently been set out clearly in the [Lievesley Review of the UK Statistics Authority](#). Those barriers are:

- “Lack of clarity, or of consistency of interpretation, amongst departments as to what data sharing legislation permits, and whether their responsibility to protect privacy would be violated.



- Fragmented and technically incompatible systems.
- A lack of understanding as to the benefits or incentives for departments to share their data, with concerns amongst staff in departments that they are carrying the risks but see little benefit.
- Resource constraints, with departments reluctant to prioritise preparing data for research purposes over their core functions.
- Cultural and organisational reasons, including a hesitancy to make administrative data available externally in case, for example, issues are identified regarding the quality of the data.” (p40)

Tackling these problems requires greater ownership of the problem at the centre of government.

There is also a challenge around the UK’s statistical and data infrastructure. The UK has one of the world’s most respected statistical systems, but – given the potential of data, especially given the advent of AI, to improve decision-making – there is a risk that we can ask too much of the system without properly supporting it. The Cabinet Office’s initial response to the Lievesley Review was encouraging in supporting many of the recommendations – but much of that support was just in principle, without any commitment to support the work with additional resources. We cannot ask the statistical system to do more, without looking at questions of resource and infrastructure.

### **How to fix it**

Addressing the challenges around data sharing requires proper grip from the centre of government. It is important that, as soon as possible, the centre of government gives a clear direction to departments to improve data sharing. Regular and transparent reporting on progress is important to build and maintain momentum. The RSS has also suggested that government departments might consider appointing data sharing officers (in the same way that they appoint data protection officers) to drive some of the cultural shift required.

We would also like to see funded plans set out to support the UK’s statistical and data infrastructure – this is important to ensure that UKSA and the wider system is properly supported to take advantage of improved data-sharing and new technologies.