

## Office for Budget Responsibility: release policy – 2021 update

- 1.1 The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) has complete discretion over the material it publishes in fulfilling its remit, including the amount of detail that is published in response to requests for information.
- 1.2 We are committed to transparency in forecasting and will routinely release most forecast information as part of our official economy and public finance forecast publications. The *Economic and fiscal outlook* will incorporate the detail we consider to be necessary to understand our forecasts and this will be accompanied by further detail in supplementary material made available on our website. The OBR will respond to any requests to explain or clarify our published forecasts promptly and on an ongoing basis.
- 1.3 We will as far as possible also meet requests to release supplementary forecast information where this will improve the quality of public debate on the public finances.

### Frequency of OBR supplementary releases

- 1.4 Where the OBR publishes supplementary material, releases will be made in an orderly manner that promotes public confidence and gives equal access to information.
- 1.5 We will publish any supplementary forecast information on our website on a weekly basis. One release of information will coincide with whichever day the Office for National Statistics (ONS) issues its monthly Public Sector Finances (PSF) release. In the weeks between ONS PSF releases, we will publish information on Thursdays. Releases will be published at 11 am.
- 1.6 Where releases are to be made, the OBR will publish the subject matter of the release on its website at 11 am on the day before the scheduled release.
- 1.7 As far as resources, the process and, where necessary, the time it takes to gather information from other departments allows, the OBR will endeavour to respond to enquiries and publish information on the next supplementary release date. Where that is not possible, information will be published as soon as is practicable.
- 1.8 Following the publication of our bi-annual *Economic and fiscal outlook* we will have an additional supplementary release date that will usually coincide with the day on which we give oral evidence to the Treasury Select Committee. This will allow us to address immediate requests for clarification of our forecast on a timely basis. As above, we will announce the subject matter of any release 24 hours ahead of publication.

### Government engagement

- 1.9 As Ministers may be expected to comment on OBR supplementary releases as they relate to the Government's fiscal policy, the OBR will inform the Treasury of requests for

information as they are received, and other departments where the subject of the requests means that is appropriate. To enable Treasury Ministers to comment on OBR releases shortly after publication, the OBR has taken the view that it is reasonable for the Treasury to have limited pre-release access. The Treasury and Treasury Ministers will therefore be provided with embargoed copies of OBR releases, for information, 24 hours before publication. The same procedures will be applied to other departments when the information being released relates to a policy issue that they oversee.

## Pre-election period of sensitivity

- 1.10 During an election there are restrictions on some activities of Government and public bodies that are in place to protect the integrity of election process. Cabinet Office issues guidance to Government, ministers and civil servants that applies to the OBR and our staff. We will refer to that guidance if a scheduled or requested release lies within the period of sensitivity.
- 1.11 Usually non-politically sensitive and pre-scheduled publications are permitted within the Cabinet Office guidance. The information underlying our forecast tends to be of greater public interest in the run-up to an election so we may also release requested information on a more frequent basis during the period of sensitivity if that is compliant with guidance. These releases would follow the same procedures set out above, where we would announce releases of information 24 hours in advance on our website. We would seek advice from the Cabinet Office, as the ultimate arbiter of the guidance, as necessary.

## Exceptional circumstances

- 1.12 In exceptional circumstances (such as those that prevailed in the early phase of the coronavirus pandemic in 2020), there may be a much greater public interest in timely information or commentary on the public finances or economic developments. In such times we may expedite or increase the frequency of information releases in order to improve the quality of information available in the public domain.
- 1.13 The same procedures as set out above would continue to apply, so we would announce a planned release 24 hours in advance on our website.