

# House of Commons: Written Statement

## Cabinet Office

Written Statement made by: **Minister of State for the Constitution and Devolution (Chloe Smith)**.

### Census 2021, England and Wales

The census for England and Wales is scheduled to take place on 21 March 2021. The census is delivered for the UK Government and the Welsh Government by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), based on its recommendations published in the December 2018 White Paper 'Help Shape Our Future' [CM 9745].

The information the census provides on the population, their characteristics, education, religion, ethnicity, working life and health, ensures that decisions made by national and local government, community groups, charities and business, are based on the best information possible. This enables a wide range of services and future planning to better serve communities and individuals across England and Wales.

This will be a digital-first census answered primarily online. The ONS has a target for online completion of 75 per cent. People will be encouraged to respond online if they can on their mobile phones, laptops, PCs or tablets. Help will be available for those who need assistance and members of the public who prefer to complete a paper form will be able to do so.

In the context of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the safety of the public and the census field force is of the utmost importance to the Government and the ONS. The ONS has designed Census 2021 to be simple, straightforward and safe to complete, to ensure that everyone can be safely counted. Its assessment is that Census 2021 can be carried out safely and securely with the flexibility built into their operation to respond to any changes in risk levels or guidance. The main census field operation will begin only after Census Day. Field staff will never enter people's houses; they will be supplied with PPE, will always be socially distanced and will work in line with all government guidance.

The ONS has already launched its schools campaign; its national media campaign will be launched in the coming weeks telling people that Census 2021 is coming and the benefits of the census. On 22 January, the ONS published a statement on the importance of going ahead with the Census in March 2021 and how they plan to do this safely for the public and census staff.

This statement is available on the ONS website:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/news/statementsandletters/census2021andcoronavirus>

Census plans have often had to anticipate and respond to events; for example, twenty years ago the census was delivered effectively during the foot and mouth crisis.

Other countries have been able to carry out their census activities during the pandemic, for example, the USA. The ONS have learnt valuable lessons from these experiences.

Following the ONS's advice, the Government is confident that Census 2021 will be successful and provide a wealth of data reflecting the society we live in today, enabling national and local government, community groups, charities and businesses to better serve communities and individuals across England and Wales.

The census in Northern Ireland will take place at the same time as England and Wales; the census in Scotland will take place in March 2022 following the decision taken by the Scottish

Government last year.