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**Professor Sir Ian Diamond** | National Statistician

William Wragg MP  
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

09 March 2020

Dear Mr Wragg,

Thank you for your letter of 4 March regarding the timetable for planning and legislation for the 2021 Census. I would also like to offer my congratulations on your appointment as Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. I look forward to meeting you to discuss the subject of your letter and the wider work of the UK Statistics Authority in greater detail.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has worked closely with the Cabinet Office to ensure that the legislative timetable and the practical preparations are co-ordinated, and I understand that the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office, Chloe Smith MP, will be writing to you in parallel regarding the legislation. You refer in your letter to the Draft Census (England and Wales) Order 2020 having been laid before Parliament on 2 March 2020. This allows sufficient time for the Census Regulations to come into force in June 2020. This timetable enables us to deliver the Census on 21 March 2021 as planned.

The 2021 Census is part of our wider Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme. The programme will transform the way we collect, process and disseminate statistics including improved and expanded population statistics. As part of this transformation, we are renewing our technology infrastructure by designing common platforms, processes and systems to maximise the capacity for reuse.

Our preparations for the 2021 Census are well underway. The recent 2019 census rehearsal tested systems and processes, as well as enabling us to rehearse the quality of our address frame, the field force, the on-line and paper questionnaires, the help we are planning to make available, and the impact of our communications, campaigns and community engagement. Between now and the census period itself, we are continuing with preparations, including taking on board lessons learned from the 2019 rehearsal.

There are two key elements of our census preparations which are dependent on the census legislation being in force before the summer recess: the census questionnaire and recruitment of the field force.

#### Census questionnaire

The 2021 Census question topics are included in the Census Order and will be set out in detail in the Census Regulations, including a facsimile of the paper questionnaire. We therefore require the Regulations to be in force before we can start to print the over 10 million paper questionnaires required for those who are unable to complete online. This

printing, and parallel preparation for the scanning of completed questionnaires, will begin this summer.

Field force

Preparations are well under way for the recruitment of around 40,000 field staff. The employment of the field force personnel will be detailed in the Regulations. We are scheduled to employ the first of these – some 300 community engagement officers - during the summer of 2020. These roles are crucial to building relationships with hard-to-reach groups to improve the response rates. Our plans are for a gradual increase in the number of field staff throughout 2019 with the bulk being recruited in time for employment in 2020.

You will appreciate that, with such a large-scale undertaking – reaching every household and communal establishment in England and Wales – our operational timetable is very detailed; however, these are key elements reliant on the legislation being in force by the summer. I am happy to discuss the timetable further with you when we meet.

ONS officials meet regularly with both the Cabinet Office and the Infrastructure and Projects Authority on the plans for the 2021 Census, including considering what contingency planning needs to be in place to mitigate the risk of delay. We remain confident that we will be able to deliver the Census in March 2021.

I am copying this letter to Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP, Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee.

Yours sincerely,



**Professor Sir Ian Diamond**