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**Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation**

Joan McAlpine MSP  
Convener  
Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

04 October 2019

Dear Ms McAlpine,

The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) has today published findings from the preliminary phase of its assessment of the 2021 Censuses in the UK, which are being undertaken by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the National Records of Scotland (NRS) and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The assessment considers the compliance of Census offices' planning, engagement and development activities to date with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

The Census is one of the most important sources of official statistics, informing decisions about almost every aspect of life within the UK. The real value of the Censuses will be realised on the release of Census outputs. Census offices will have to deliver high quality data and statistics in a variety of forms to support the wide range of different uses that are required.

You may be interested to note our assessment as it may be relevant to associated debates and decision making as part of the ongoing legislative process required for Censuses in the UK in 2021. Our findings from the assessment are drawn from across the three pillars of the Code of Practice for Statistics<sup>1</sup>. They build on the existing work being undertaken by Census offices and should provide further direction and focus on pre-existing plans. Our findings include:

To enhance trustworthiness, Census offices must ensure their actions and decisions are visibly taken with the honesty, integrity and independence necessary to deliver data and statistics that are of high quality and serve the public good. Census offices should be open and transparent on their decision-making processes and in their decisions on Census questions and guidance, particularly in relation to any areas of contention.

To enhance the quality of the statistics, Census offices should make information on the methodology and quality assurance arrangements available to users at the earliest opportunity. Census offices are developing their quality management approaches and developing various methods to support Census operations, data processing and outputs. Information on these arrangements should be made available so users of Census statistics and data can have confidence in the approaches taken and can feed into developments as appropriate.

To enhance the value of the statistics, Census offices could benefit from working together more closely to better engage with users and stakeholders of UK Census data and statistics who have views and insights that are relevant across Census offices. Census offices should also be clear about the impact of country-specific decision making for UK Census data and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/>

statistics and work together to provide greater transparency around their plans and decision making in meeting the needs of users interested in UK Census outputs.

We recognise and commend the commitments already made by individual Census offices to work together, plan, develop and implement effective systems and processes to deliver the 2021 Censuses, and their focus on undertaking research and testing to form judgements on the most appropriate Census design and questions so data and statistics are of high quality and public value.

As the independent regulator of UK official statistics, OSR will continue to play a role in the assurance of Census 2021, by engaging with Census offices and users of Census 2021 outputs. In accordance with the requirements of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007, future phases of this assessment will allow OSR to recommend to the UK Statistics Authority whether published Census 2021 outputs should be designated as National Statistics. Census offices' actions to address the assessment's findings will inform those recommendations.

I am copying this letter to Iain Bell, Deputy National Statistician, ONS; Debra Prestwood, Head of Profession for Statistics, ONS; Paul Lowe, Registrar General and Keeper of the Records of Scotland; Roger Halliday, Chief Statistician and Data Officer, Scottish Government; Siobhan Carey, Chief Executive and Registrar General for Northern Ireland; Glyn Jones, Chief Statistician, Welsh Government.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson  
Director General for Regulation