

**census**  
2021

# Councillor handbook

**The census takes place on  
21 March 2021**

This handbook explains what the census is all about, why it matters and how you can help spread the word in your council and community.



## **Please use this space to record your contacts:**

Census liaison manager:

Telephone number:

Email:

Assistant census liaison manager:

Telephone number:

Email:

Census engagement manager:

Telephone number:

Email:

**Please note:** The information in this document is correct at the time of writing. Should developments related to Covid-19 or other unforeseen circumstances require us to change our approach to Census 2021, we will endeavour to update you as they occur.

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# Introduction

## Dear Councillor

Welcome to your handbook that outlines our plans for Census 2021. It explains why the census is important and how you can help us to make it a success in your area.

Population statistics are vital to our country: nationally, locally and within communities. Once every 10 years the census provides an opportunity to build a detailed and comprehensive picture of the nation.

The census is for everyone. The whole population has the chance to provide the information that can help to ensure their communities are well served.

For local authorities, census population estimates underpin both planning and provision of public services. Getting the best possible response rates for the census will make sure that decisions are based on accurate, high-quality data.

This handbook explains what's new for Census 2021. We've made some changes to reflect how society has changed in the last 10 years, adding new questions, and taking a "digital-first" approach. This means people can complete their census where and when they want to online. Paper questionnaires are still available for people who need them.

We've outlined some of the challenges the ONS faces in making sure census estimates truly represent the make-up of communities and numbers of people within them.

We've indicated areas where councillors and local authority staff can give support and encouragement to local people.

We're focused on understanding the needs of local authorities. Developing effective partnerships with your authority is how we'll make sure your community's needs are understood and reflected in census information.

In 2021, we want the overall return rate to be as high as it was in the 2011 Census, where we had a response rate of 94% with at least 80% in all local authority areas. This will ensure comparability between local authority areas. We're also aiming to get a 75% online response rate so that we can release our census outputs quicker, allowing people to benefit from the census information sooner.

We've asked your local authority to designate two officers as census liaison manager and assistant census liaison manager to act as your census leads. These staff will be our key contacts in your council for everything to do with Census 2021 and we'll work with them to support census activities in your area.

As an influential public figure, your endorsement and support of the census will have a positive impact, encouraging your constituents to take part.

Thank you, in advance, for supporting your council's census plans and activities – and for encouraging all people in your area to take part in the census.

*Peter Benton*.

**Peter Benton**  
Director of Census Operations  
Office for National Statistics



# Why we have a census

Every 10 years the census gives us a complete picture of the nation. It allows us to compare different groups of people across the United Kingdom because questions are asked in a consistent manner throughout England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

At the Office for National Statistics (ONS) we're responsible for planning and running the census in England and Wales. We work closely with the census offices in Scotland and Northern Ireland, who run their own censuses. This booklet covers the census for England and Wales.

The ONS, and the statistics we generate, are independent from government. Although we report to the UK Parliament, our work is protected from political interference.

You can read more about the ONS at [www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk)

Census population estimates are vital in helping to shape the communities in which we live and work.

Census statistics:

- underpin policy making and council funding allocation from central government
- provide information to help plan and prioritise service delivery
- give a benchmark for estimates of population between censuses
- provide unique detailed demographic information about local small area populations

Charities and voluntary organisations often use it as evidence to get funding. It helps businesses to understand us as customers and, for example, decide where to open new shops. Plus, those doing research, like university students and people looking into their family history, use the information.

Without the census – and without people in your community telling us about their household and home – it would be much more difficult to do this. That's why it's so important everyone takes part.

## The link between census estimates and public service funding

Billions of pounds are allocated to local authorities in England and Wales every year using census information.

It's important that census estimates are accurate so these funds are allocated where they're needed. To get accurate estimates, we need a good response to the census from all areas and communities.



# Examples of how local authorities use census information



## Planning and development

Planners use census information to develop local plans that reflect future needs. It also informs funding bids by identifying inequalities at a local level.



## Public health and social care

Local authorities use census information to understand service demand, identify pockets of health deprivation and support future care planning.



## Education

Pupil forecasting models use census information to inform capital bids and to monitor the supply of qualified people.



## Transport

Census information supports funding bids for road improvements and informs planning and profiles around changes to public transport.



## Housing

Census information helps to measure housing affordability and assess local housing needs.



## Other

Local Authorities use census information to inform emergency services, library services, and waste collection and disposal.

# What's new for census 2021?

It's vital that the census sheds light on long-term trends, while also reflecting the society in which we live today. So, we're planning a few changes for the next census.

## A “digital-first” census

Census 2021 will be mainly online. We know there are people who'll find this challenging. To make sure the census is as accessible and inclusive as possible, we'll offer a full range of support services. These include:

- comprehensive guidance and support in many languages and formats
- help in local centres with trained staff and online access
- a contact centre to provide help via telephone, web chat and social media
- field staff contacting households that have not yet responded
- accessible census questionnaires, for example in large print
- the option to request paper questionnaires

We'll automatically issue paper questionnaires in areas where we've identified residents are highly likely to need them.

No one from the ONS or working for the census will ever ask for payment to help anyone fill in their questionnaire.



## Data protection and privacy

The census asks questions about you, your home and the people who live in it. We keep the personal information you give us in the census safe and confidential by law for 100 years.

When we publish statistics from the census, we don't publish information that will enable you to be identified. We have a strict security regime that follows government standards. This includes physical and IT security measures to protect your data, covering people, processes and technology.

What's more, no one can tell who you are in the statistics we publish. We make sure that they include none of your personal information.

All our systems, staff and suppliers, and the way we do things, must protect your confidentiality by law. It's a crime for anyone to share it. Other government departments, private organisations and individuals will not have access to any personal information.

## What does the census ask?

The information we collect during the census allows us to create an in-depth picture of our society. It also helps us identify important trends that will help the government to plan services and allocate funding.

To achieve this, the census asks questions on a range of topics, including information about:

- individuals, such as their name, age, sex and marital status
- households, such as family relationships
- the homes we live in, such as their location, number of occupants and what facilities they have

The ONS only ever publishes anonymous statistics from the census. We don't publish anyone's name. We only ask for them to help ensure the statistics are accurate, for example, to help make sure that each person is only counted once.

## New questions to reflect the needs of society

Following discussions with the public, testing and research, and after careful consideration, Census 2021 will include questions on three new topics. These are:

- previous UK Armed Forces service
- gender identity
- sexual orientation

The UK Armed Forces question will gather information on past service in the UK Armed Forces. This will help service providers support veterans in accordance with the Armed Forces Covenant – a promise between our country and those who have served it.

The questions on sexual orientation and gender identity will give us better information on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender populations. This will allow for better monitoring of inequalities and better delivery of public services for these groups.

We'll only ask these questions to people aged 16 years and over. The sexual orientation and gender identity questions will also be voluntary, so no one will be forced to answer if they do not want to. People can also request an Individual Questionnaire and give their answers separately from others in their household if they wish.

# How will the ONS boost participation?

## Local authority partnerships

Our partnerships with local councils will be vital to the success of the census. It's important we work together to:

- raise public awareness of the census
- make sure the address index is accurate
- share local information to inform and support our field operations

## Introducing a new address index

An accurate address index is vital to our success.

It underpins all census operations by helping us:

- make contact with all addresses in England and Wales
- track completed questionnaires
- follow up addresses we have not received a response from

## Questionnaire tracking

Questionnaire tracking will make sure the census reaches as many people as possible. It also lets us know which addresses we need our field teams to follow up.

## Field follow-up

We'll be following up questionnaires that have not been returned despite being sent reminders. A flexible field team will also carry out intensive follow-up activity targeted at areas where high numbers of households have not returned their questionnaires.

## An accessible census

We want to make sure everyone has the support they need to be able to take part in the census. That's why we'll be providing a range of support services. This'll include guidance in many languages, online help, a contact centre and local census support centres.

## Specialist field staff

We're introducing census engagement managers (CEMs) for 2021. CEMs will work with local authorities and community leaders to promote the benefits of the census and gain support for it. They'll develop a partnership working plan with the local authority that will contain details of agreed activities and support for the census. The CEM is your local link to census information. If you've not met your CEM already, ask your council's assistant census liaison manager to put you in touch.

We'll also employ community advisers (CAs) in some areas. Their role will be to engage with specific communities that we've identified as needing extra support and encouragement to see the benefits of the census. They'll aim to encourage these communities to fill in the census questionnaire.

## A wide-reaching marketing campaign

Our marketing campaign will raise awareness of the census. It'll include adverts in newspapers, on television, radio and social media, as well as posters on buses and billboards. Some adverts will be targeted at the general population. We'll tailor others to address the needs of specific groups, such as students, older people, or people who may not speak English as their first language.

We'll also work with partners like schools and businesses to spread the word and encourage support.

# Working with local councils for Census 2021

We're asking the chief executives of every council to appoint a census liaison manager (CLM) and an assistant census liaison manager (ACLM) to support the census. These roles were highly effective in the 2011 Census and are our first point of contact within the councils for local census planning and activity.

At a senior level, the CLMs will be discussing, planning and coordinating census activities. They'll help to build awareness and encourage support throughout the local authority. ACLMs will support them, taking responsibility for the everyday liaison at an operational level.

Our partnership with local councils is designed to boost response rates for all population groups. We've worked with local authorities through our Census Advisory Groups, and our Local Authority Operational Management Group to draw up our plans. These groups have representatives from many different councils and their views have helped us to shape our plans and procedures.

As well as working with local authorities, we're focusing on building relationships with groups of people who may be reluctant, or find it difficult, to take part.

We need to be able to tap into local knowledge and understanding to deal with the issues faced by these groups sensitively. This is why we're asking local councils and community organisations to work with us to promote, explain and support Census 2021.

# How can councillors help with Census 2021?

The involvement and support of councillors and council executives will be vital to ensure a successful census in all local authority areas.

## Things for you to consider

- Are you up to date with local plans and activities - are you being regularly briefed on census progress in your area?
- Has your council appointed a CLM and ACLM?
- Do you know who the CLM and ACLM are and have you met them?
- What can you do as a community leader to build local awareness of, and support for, the census?
- Your endorsement is influential – could you encourage people to take part in the census?

# How can local councils help with Census 2021?

## Developing the address index

We're already working directly with your council to ensure we have an accurate household address index. Local knowledge is essential in helping us identify and resolve missing or duplicate addresses and other errors that could impact the accuracy of our post-out operation.

Your council team's community knowledge can also help us with our field checks and building an accurate list of communal establishments, such as care homes, university halls of residence and military bases.

## Building community profiles

We know that by building on our understanding of local communities, we can better encourage people to take part in the census. We're already working with councils to identify local groups we need to approach in different ways when it comes to carrying out the census, community engagement and publicity. Groups include:

- non-English speakers
- faith groups
- older people
- Gypsy, Traveller and Roma groups
- short-term migrant workers
- asylum seekers
- the homeless and rough sleepers

Your council's ACLM will play an important role in helping us build a profile of your community. This profile will help our publicity, community liaison work and field operations reach local people.



## Promoting the census in your area

For Census 2021, we're using a mix of national and local publicity, advertising, and public and media relations to highlight the importance of the census and explain why and how people should take part. We'll also use targeted communications for specific population groups such as young people and students, ethnic minority communities, older people and those who are economically disadvantaged.

Your council's ACLM and the council's communications team will work together with support from ONS to help us spread the word in your neighbourhoods and community groups.

## Developing community liaison contacts

We'd like to build on the relationships your council already has with your community and voluntary groups. By working together, we'll be able to tailor our community liaison more effectively and publicise important census messages.

Your ACLM can help the census engagement manager to identify contacts, forums and other channels for reaching local people and strategic partners who fall within our target population groups.



## **Identifying candidates for local field staff recruitment**

For the census we'll employ a large team of temporary field staff in England and Wales. These will include engagement managers, community advisers, operational managers and other field staff.

We'll provide information for your council to publicise census field staff opportunities to local community groups and similar organisations, such as local strategic partners. This could be through a range of channels, including newsletters, social media, emails, libraries, community centres, websites and local events.

We're also asking your council team to identify suitable candidates with appropriate experience and encourage them to apply for Census 2021 jobs. These may include electoral canvassers or people who worked on the last census. Census recruitment information, including how to apply, is at [www.censusjobs.co.uk](http://www.censusjobs.co.uk)

## **Supporting the online census**

Census 2021 will be primarily online, but there are people who find going online challenging. That's why we'll be making help available at a network of Census Support Centres.

People who are not confident or do not have access to the internet can go to their nearest centre to get help with accessing the online questionnaire. They'll be located in trusted places within communities, so people can get the help they need as part of their daily routine. Information on where your nearest Census Support Centres are will be available on the census website.

You can help us by positively promoting an online census and signposting local Census Support Centres through your surgeries and newsletters.

## **Supporting local publicity and media relations**

We'd welcome you promoting Census 2021 in the media and through social media.

Please speak to your local census engagement manager (CEM) who can help with the correct census messaging. They'll have the latest relevant local messages and are already working with local authorities and communities to engage them in the census.

## **Supporting local census field teams**

We'd be grateful for any support you can offer to our local field staff during the census.

For example, your council may know of, or own:

- suitable office accommodation where our managers could train field staff and hold meetings
- secure storage space for our materials and equipment
- car parking, or other facilities we could use

Please make any offers of help and support to the ONS through your census liaison manager.

## Useful links

Local authority resources: [www.census.gov.uk/partners](http://www.census.gov.uk/partners)

ONS census webpage: [www.census.gov.uk](http://www.census.gov.uk)



## Contacts

If you have any questions about our partnership activities with local authorities and community liaison, please email us at [2021Census.LA.Liaison@ons.gov.uk](mailto:2021Census.LA.Liaison@ons.gov.uk)

Your local authority's census liaison manager and assistant census liaison manager are your internal census contacts.

