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## Census Risk Assessment – Jan 2021

Following the announcement by the Prime Minister on 4<sup>th</sup> January about the need for a further nationwide lockdown, likely to last into March, an assessment of the impact on the Census collection operation has been undertaken.

The framework for the assessment of the changed risk profile has been undertaken around the following four questions:

1. Can we keep everyone, our people and public, safe?
2. Can we finish the remaining preparations to reach go live, both in terms of digital build, final testing internally and with suppliers as well as the recruitment of field staff?
3. Can we run the Census operation?
4. If we do run the operation, can we meet our key performance indicators around response rate and the quality of public statistics?

Additionally, to support the assessment, an assessment of costs and likely potential alternative options has also taken place.

To frame this risk assessment, two key planning assumptions have been made. These are:

1. Current lockdown is likely to last for 12 weeks. 4<sup>th</sup> January to 19<sup>th</sup> March. Assuming all activity during this period should be virtual where possible, or where this is not possible in a socially distanced way.
2. Restrictions are likely to continue beyond 19<sup>th</sup> March, but at what level and where is unknown.

### **Can we keep everyone, our people and public, safe?**

The Census operation has been built to be COVID safe. Both in terms of the recruitment processes and the activities field officers are being asked to undertake. Sufficient PPE has been ordered, based on current guidelines, to protect our field force and training will be provided on its use. All field work will run socially distanced and for the main Census operation there is no need for any of our people to cross the threshold and enter someone's home.

Up to Christmas 2020 all field work has been virtual and plans to start to make it more interactive were due to realise from Jan 2021. This can all be undertaken in a “safe” way, however, consideration for a completely virtual operation for the next 12 weeks (to 19<sup>th</sup> March) should be considered.

Recruitment had been moved online and is complete virtual apart from 2 elements. Right to work check and the collection of kit. We are unable to find virtual options for this work and are therefore investigating a safe way to conduct these two elements.

Supplier checks have been ongoing since April 2020 and need to continue and provisions are in place for PPE and social distancing guidelines are followed. However, permission to travel is sought for those people who will need to travel to undertake these essential checks and less effective virtual options are in place if needed.

The United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have provided guidance to statistical institute regarding the running of a Census during a pandemic [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/census/documents/ppe\\_in\\_censuses.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/census/documents/ppe_in_censuses.pdf).

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Whilst they recommend the postponement of Census during a pandemic, for those countries wishing to continue a priority goal is to reduce the risk of transmission for all census personnel, and for the general public. The choice of PPE products for census should be defined by census authorities in government, in consultation with national health authorities, and in light of WHO guidelines.

### Assessment:

We believe that the operation is safe. However, we recommend the following mitigations to support the running of the operation to account for the latest restrictions:

- Review of Health and Safety procedures, including how to ensure PPE is used effectively and on an ongoing basis
- Access the mass testing that will be made available for those that can't work from home for the field force.
- Review of recruitment processes has been conducted we now need to review how we make right to work checks and kit collection COVID safe. Review of the Community Engagement work to ensure it remains virtual until the 19<sup>th</sup> March – this will include completion events
- Review of the opening of Local Census Support Centres during the restrictions
- Review and implement virtual community engagement events until the end of national lockdown or throughout the whole operation.

### **Can we finish the remaining preparations to reach go live, both in terms of digital build, final testing internally and with suppliers as well as the recruitment of field staff?**

A number of factors will impact our ability to complete the remaining build:

- Digital Build
- Final internal technical testing
- Final supplier testing
- Final end-to-end testing
- Recruitment
- Availability of staff due to caring responsibilities – both internally, with suppliers and within Local Authorities/Supporting Organisations
- Stakeholder and user perception of continuing with Census and possible impact to reputation of ONS – including the political dimensions to this debate
- Physical building availability – kit hand over, assisted digital etc. (operational section)
- Field parallel process – issues with childcare.

Build is on track for completion as planned and testing is underway. Support is being provided by DST who are also readying themselves for go live. A reduction in staff numbers could provide pressure on readiness for go live which could in turn lead to more operational issues. The same is true for testing.

### Assessment:

We believe that we can complete the build. However, we recommend the following mitigations to support the running of the operation to account of the latest restrictions:

- Assess the impact of a reduced technology out-of-hour service.
- Cancel the planned early enumeration of Halls of Residence at the three universities selected for early enumeration– in parallel investigate alternative methods to enumerate.

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- Make the remaining CE follow up operation online/virtual up to the 23<sup>rd</sup> March once initial contact has been made
- Talk to suppliers more about their assessment of success
- Recruitment – consider the timings for the commencement of the T1 officers and the CE Officers – tie into thinking about a possible delay of field work (see end of paper)
- Community Engagement – ensure completion events are virtual until 23<sup>rd</sup> March. Also consider running whole operation with no physical completion events, make all virtual.

**Can we run the Census Operation?**

The high-level timeline of events for the Census Operation is:

- 12<sup>th</sup> Feb paid advertising campaign starts
- 14<sup>th</sup> Feb commence university halls
- 23<sup>rd</sup> Feb engagement with public opens (households and CEs), eQ goes live, contact centres open etc.
- 1<sup>st</sup> March initial contact letters will be issued, and community completion events start
- 8<sup>th</sup> March commence distribution of manager packs to CEs
- 23<sup>rd</sup> March main field operation commences
- 4<sup>th</sup> of May CCS commences
- 11<sup>th</sup> of May Non-compliance work commences

A number of factors will impact our ability to run the operation:

- Ability to update and flex the media campaign - to get public on board and manage perceptions
- Continuing public support from Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Assembly.
- Ability to maintain an effective and willing field force
- Ability to move the field force as required to support response rates
- Ability to maintain effective and willing HQ operation to support the field
- Ability to run community engagement and completion events.
- Public perception of government and its impact on willingness to complete
- Working practices required for CCS
- Working practices required for Non-Compliance
- Suppliers ability to maintain sufficient cover to run operations.
- Suppliers are not impacted by any other priority commitments related to vaccination rollout and have the permission to go ahead with Census work if they are challenged.

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