

17 June 2025

Richard Leonard MSP
Convener
Public Audit Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

By email: publicaudit.committee@parliament.scot

Dear Richard Leonard MSP

Scotland's Census 2031 – National Records of Scotland (NRS) recommendation

I am writing to inform you that I have today (17 June 2025) recommended to Scottish Ministers that NRS deliver a mandatory questionnaire-based population census in 2031. This will be developed in partnership with, and at the same time as, the rest of the UK. Scotland's Census 2031 will be underpinned by Scottish legislation and will meet the needs of service providers and data users for statistics which represent Scotland's whole population. Ministers have publicly noted their support in principle, with further detailed plans to follow.

Scotland has taken a census once every ten years since 1801, except for 1941. Since 1951 censuses across the UK have been held on the same date, except for in 2021 when Scotland's census was postponed due to the pandemic.

The census produces invaluable information about our population, housing and characteristics. Our 2022 Census produced over a billion statistics, which are being used by governments, local authorities, businesses, academics and third sector organisations. They inform policy development, decision making, resource allocation, planning, research and equality monitoring. Importantly they are used to determine Barnett formula outcomes, local authority funding and health board allocations. The census is the only source of such rich data.

The next census will be informed by the lessons that we learned from the 2022 Census. We will collaborate more closely with census offices in the rest of the UK and make greater use of administrative data from the outset.

The three UK census offices have a strong track record of collaboration. Continuing to collaborate with the Office for National Statistics and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency for a future census is essential to ensure UK harmonisation of census outputs and the coherence of statistics which underpin the wider UK statistics system. NRS is keen to collaborate further with the potential for even greater opportunities for efficiencies across all UK census taking bodies.

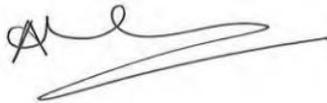
Reflecting on our experiences from Scotland's Census 2022, we recognise that a key lesson is to design and integrate the use of administrative data from the outset of our planning and design phases. Administrative data is information gathered by government and public sector

organisations during their regular operations and service delivery. It is collected for operational purposes, such as managing services, processing transactions and record keeping, rather than for statistical analysis. Looking forward, we also see the potential for administrative data to play a greater role in the production of census type statistics. Over the coming years, NRS will investigate the use of administrative data in the census and other population statistics.

As Scotland's society, economy and culture changes, the information that users want from the census also changes. Our statistical outputs must remain relevant. That's why we're also launching a consultation today on the topics to be covered in the next census. We're seeking users' views on how they use the 2022 outputs and what their future statistical requirements are. Further details can be found in our [consultation paper](#).

I hope that this information on Scotland's census is of interest to you and the wider Committee. I would be more than happy to arrange for a member of my team to brief the Committee should you require more detail.

Yours sincerely



Alison Byrne OBE
Registrar General for Scotland

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