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I would like to thank you for your supportive and positive contributions during Committee for the Census (Return Particulars and Removal of Penalties) Bill on Tuesday 4 June. You raised points regarding both the promotion of the 2021 Census and the veterans' question, on which I write with further detail.

2021 Census promotion and campaigns

The point you made on campaigns at the Committee was well made. The Census is an important civic event and it should be recognised as that. The Office for National Statistics (ONS), as I mentioned at Committee, is organising both national and local campaigns to highlight that everyone in England and Wales should complete the Census and that it is their opportunity to identify themselves as they wish. The ONS is working with a range of stakeholders, including the Government Equalities Office, to ensure the campaigns are as effective as possible in engaging different groups.

Alongside promotional material, the ONS is also organising a community engagement programme where they will engage with representative groups to support Census activities, for example, completion events. The ONS recognise the importance of this activity and is investing in a separate and dedicated community engagement team, whereas in 2011 the field operations team carried out this work. The large field operations team for the 2021 Census will be fully briefed on helping minority groups and will assist with census completion.

Veterans question in the 2021 Census

You also asked what consideration was given in recommending that the question for veterans is not voluntary. The ONS proposals in the White Paper 'Help Shape our Future: The 2021 Census of Population and Housing in England and Wales' were informed by a considerable programme of research over the preceding three years. The Ministry of Defence, the Royal British Legion, the Soldiers' Charity, Blesma - The Limbless Veterans, Forces in Mind Trust, Help for Heroes, RAF Benevolent Fund and the Local Government Association as well as individual local authorities were among those who responded to

the consultation. The main need identified by central and local government and the charities that work with veterans and their families, was to meet their commitments under the Armed Forces Covenant.

While a clear need for this data was identified, collecting this information was not seen as controversial and the issue of making the question voluntary did not arise. The ONS ran a public acceptability survey targeted at veterans and family members of veterans. There were over 1,000 respondents and 88% of those thought it was publicly acceptable.

As I mentioned in the Second Reading, on Monday 13 May, confidentiality of census data remains paramount. All personal data collected by the census will be stored confidentially and will not be released for 100 years. Members of households will be able to request their own individual census form if there is information they do not wish to disclose to the householder completing the census on behalf of the household.

In Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) is continuing to research a number of ways to meet the need for data on veterans, including the use of administrative data and/or a question on the 2021 Census. In testing, the question was found to be generally acceptable. However, research has also indicated that some veterans may be unwilling to disclose this information. This could be mitigated by providing assurances about privacy and through additional guidance. While NISRA intends to include a veterans' question in the 2019 census rehearsal, they will undertake further research before making a final recommendation for the 2021 Census.

I would be happy to meet to discuss these issues further. I will also place a copy of this letter in the House library.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Lord Young of Cookham', with a large flourish extending to the right.

LORD YOUNG OF COOKHAM