



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Review of the future design options for the Health Survey for England

Health Studies User Conference

Paul Niblett (DHSC) and Tim Vizard (ONS)

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Background to ONS review

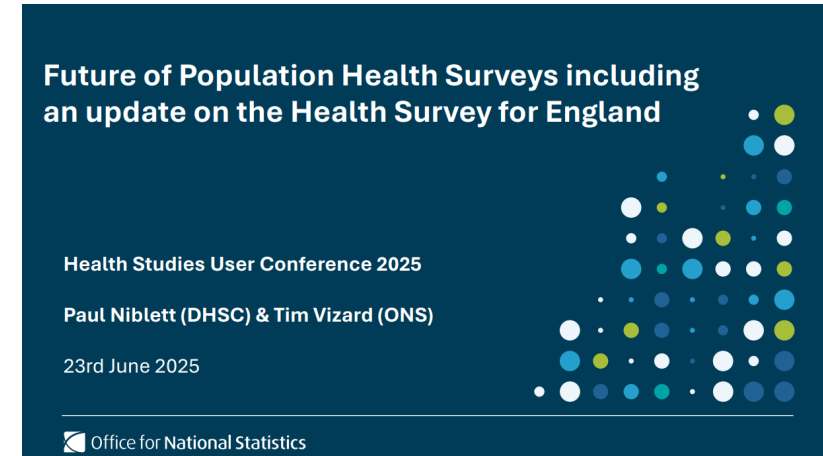
- ❖ The Health Survey for England (HSE) is currently funded by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and commissioned by NHS England (NHSE). It is an essential resource for monitoring population health. Along with other population health surveys it provides vital intelligence about the nation's health, informs policy development and helps track progress against the 10-year health plan.
- ❖ NHSE and DHSC have been considering future requirements for the HSE, given a number of factors including the public consultation on health and care statistics, the ongoing development of the health mission metrics, advances in statistical methods and challenges with traditional survey sample sizes.
- ❖ To ensure the survey remains relevant, and to enable modernisation while maintaining continuity, DHSC commissioned the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to undertake a review of the future design options. The ONS report was published on 11 March 2026.

Background to the Health Survey for England

- The Health Survey for England is **annual national survey** monitoring health and health-related behaviour.
- Covers **adults aged 16 years and older**, and children aged 0 to 15 years (living in private households in England).
- Comprises a **face-to-face survey**, followed by **biomedical nurse visit** to collect physical measurements and biological samples.
- 2024 survey achieved a household response rate of 35%. In total, 9,220 adults and 1,950 children were interviewed, of those 4,966 adults and 781 children had a health visit.

Timeline of Review

- Project launched in January 2025, which looked at future design options for the Health Survey for England.
- [Presentation](#) in June 2025 to UK Data Service Health Studies User Conference, which set out the approach being taken for the project:
 - Assess user need
 - Explore opportunities from admin data sources
 - Review key elements of survey design
 - Consider impact of any potential changes
- Findings from ONS review published 11 March 2026
[[ONS review of the future design options for the Health Survey for England](#)]

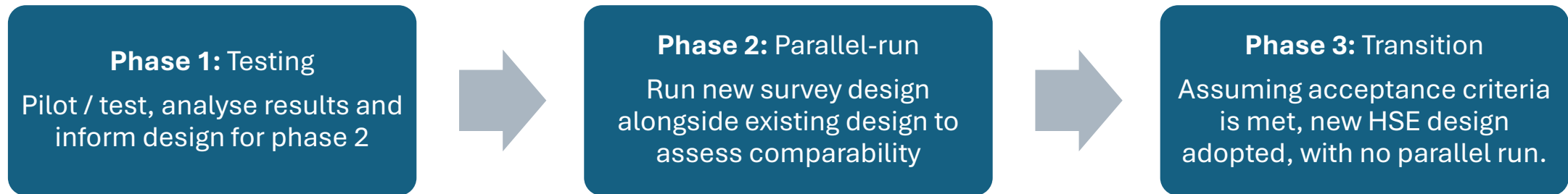


Core Requirements for the Review

- Requirements obtained through engagement with DHSC and wider stakeholders:
 - **Interviews with stakeholders** (DHSC, NHS England, contractors and analysts working on Health Survey for England)
 - **Survey of Health Survey for England users:** Around 185 responses received – thank you!
- Key themes for the review:
 - Modernise the survey design and delivery of HSE
 - Maintain reliable data on emerging health needs, particularly to support long term trend analysis
 - Explore where administrative data could support survey data collection and analysis.

Taking a phased approach to HSE redesign

- A three-phased approach was recommended to enable time to assess impact of moving HSE to online first survey design.



- During Phases 1 and 2, current HSE survey via standard face-to-face interviews would run at same time to maintain collection of HSE data, while understanding any impacts on data quality and time series.

Survey Mode and Length

- **Survey Mode**

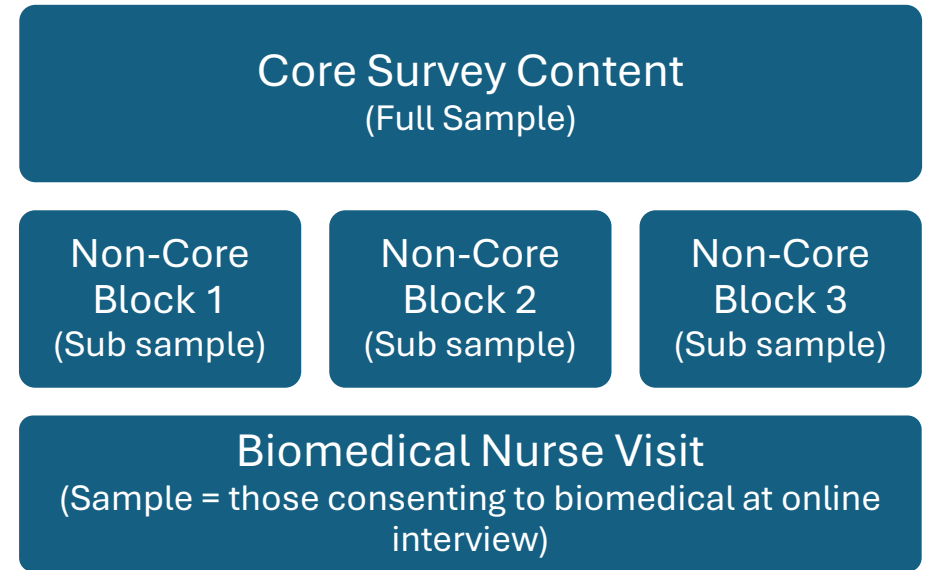
- Report recommends moving to online first-data collection. This follows similar designs adopted by other health surveys (e.g. [National Diet and Nutrition Survey](#)).
- Alternative data collection mode (e.g. telephone) would be required to aid accessibility.
- Face to Face biomedical appointment with nurse would follow, to obtain high quality data on measurements including blood pressure, waist and hip measurements, and biological samples.

- **Survey Length**

- Current HSE: 52 minutes for single adult face to face interview, 29 minutes for biomedical
- Consideration needed around optimum length for online data collection [e.g. [Transformed Labour Force Survey Design Review](#)].
- Online testing during Phases 1 and 2 should assess the impact of survey length on data quality, coverage, respondent fatigue, drop-off rates and "satisficing" behaviour.

Modularisation of survey content

- Report sets out that a shorter survey could be achieved through implementing a modularised design.
- All adults complete a core set of demographic and health questions, while additional "non-core" health topics are asked of respondents through random sampling principles.
- This approach would help maintain a similar number of topics currently covered in the survey, manage respondent burden and maintain overall statistical power.
- However, this approach would reduce the facility to assess comorbidities, as not all respondents would answer every question.



Survey Content

- **Moving Survey Questions online**

- Special consideration will be required when moving content currently collected through face-to-face interviews to an online-first mode.
- Report explored frameworks and previous research into moving survey questions from face to face to online data collection [e.g. [Health Survey for England 2020 to 2021 Feasibility Study](#)].
- Survey content should also be assessed using a range of quality assurance methods, such as cognitive testing and piloting content to help identify risks arising from the transition to online data collection and mitigate any impact on data quality where possible.
- However, it is possible that moving to an online questionnaire may create a break in some time series.

Survey Design

- **Sampling**

- Propose maintaining similar design to current HSE (sample unit and sample frame).
- Sample Size:
 - Proposal to temporary reduce HSE survey sample during phase 1 and 2.
 - Reduction would be limited to avoid negative impact on quality or precision of results.
 - This would be used to fund testing and parallel run during phase 1 and phase 2.
 - Phase 3 could then see a larger issued sample size for HSE, delivering greater statistical precision for core content (and equal statistical power for non-core content) when compared to current HSE. This would be enabled through reduced data collection costs.

Data Linkage

- **Data Linkage**

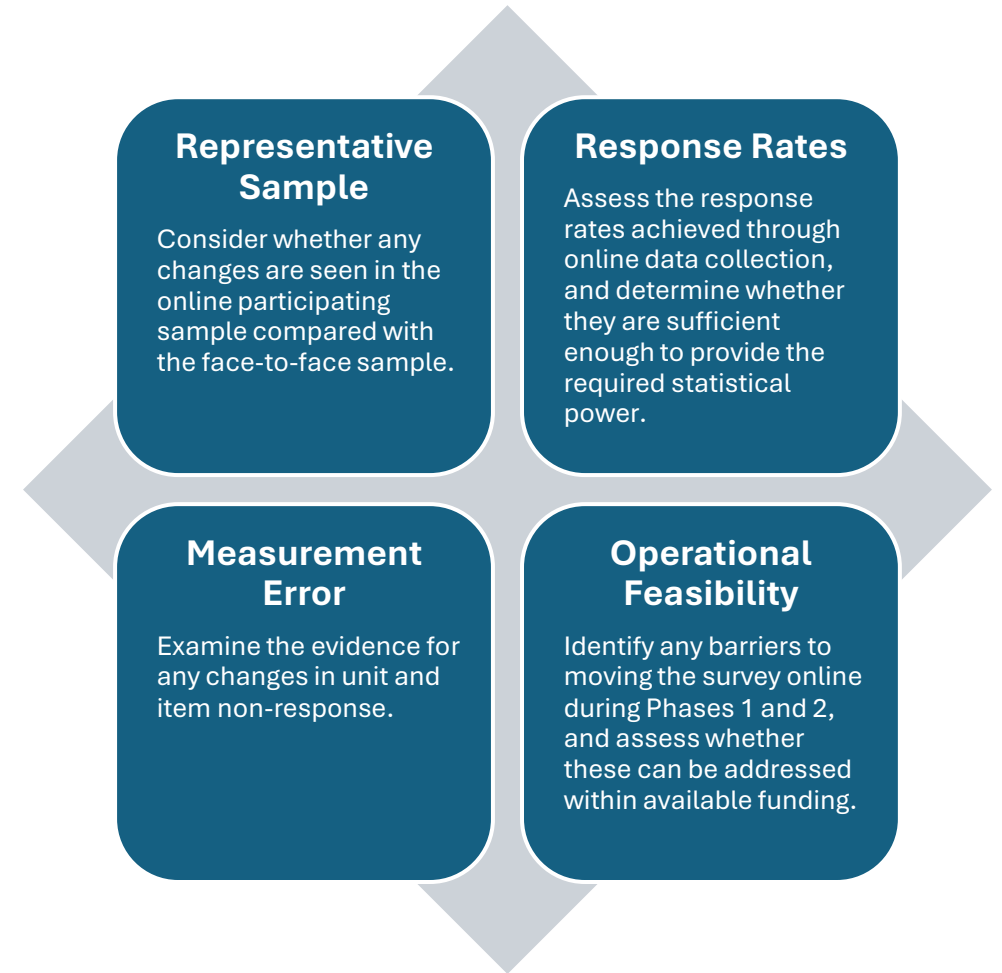
- Report recommends embedding data linkage across the entire survey lifecycle, from sampling and design through to data processing and analysis.
- Examples include:
 - Support **targeted sampling**
 - Improve **weighting strategies**
 - Potential to **reduce survey length**, through obtaining data from admin sources
 - Linked admin data to increase **analytical opportunities**.

Quality and Acceptance Criteria

- **Acceptance Criteria**

- Quality of HSE data central to decision making when deciding to implement findings from discovery phase
- Changes will introduce some discontinuities in survey design, and time series
- Impact of these can be mitigated (testing and methodological adjustments), however some will persist.
- Phase 1 and 2 allows time to assess potential differences and mitigate where possible.

Quality Considerations



Content of Report

Final Report available on ONS website, covering a wide range of content:

Overview of Health Survey for England design review

About the Health Survey for England

- Background to the survey
- Core requirements for a future Health Survey for England

Important considerations around survey design

- A three-phased approach to implementing a future Health Survey for England
- Survey mode
- Survey length
- Modularisation of survey content
- Sampling [Target population, Sampling unit, Sampling frame, sample size, sampling method, local-area estimates, sample boosts]
- Weighting
- Incentives

Survey Content

- Socio-demographic characteristics
- Topic Priorities
- Moving Survey Questions online

Data collection

- Communication materials [Making first contact, Reminders]
- Measurements and assessments

Data processing, analysis, linkage and management

- Data processing and analysis
- Data Linkage
- Data Management

Quality

- Acceptance Criteria
- Cognitive Testing
- Pilot testing and “dress rehearsal”

Ethics

[Source: ONS review of the future design options for the Health Survey for England: March 2026](#)

Next steps

- The ONS review also considered whether ONS could assume future commissioning responsibilities for the HSE. However, outcomes from an internal ONS prioritisation exercise concluded that continued future involvement in the HSE would not be prioritised. As a result, ONS involvement in the Health Survey for England concluded upon publication of their report.
- NHS E have just completed fieldwork on one round of the HSE to cover 2025 and 2026 and have just extended their contract with Natcen to run a 2027 survey using the existing survey methodology.
- DHSC will take on the commissioning role for future surveys from NHSE.
- We're considering the findings from the ONS review, including how and when they can be implemented.
- Future updates on HSE will be issued via this webpage.
 - [Health Survey for England - Health, social care and lifestyles - NHS England Digital](#)