

Census Outputs Geography Working Group

Minutes of Census Outputs Geography Working Group 13 May 2010, Ladywell House, Edinburgh

Present:

Angela Adams (Glasgow and Clyde Valley Strategic Development Plan Team)
David Blue (General Register Office for Scotland (GROS))
Jenny Boag (Falkirk Council)
Paul Davison (Stirling Council) – deputising for Paul McNamara
Prof. Robin Flowerdew (University of St. Andrews)
Neil Gilchrist (GROS)
Heidi Goodship (Scottish Borders Council)
Alan Lambie (South Lanarkshire Council)
David Matthews (Dundee City Council)
Ann-Marie Meikle (GROS)
Matt Perkins (Scottish Government)
James Reid (EDINA)
Alan Sloan (GROS)
Euan Smith (Scottish Government)
Bob Stead (West Lothian Council)
Sandy Taylor (GROS)

1 Welcome, Apologies, Minutes and Actions

- 1.1 **Apologies:** Paul McNamara (Stirling Council), Tricia Couper (GROS)
- 1.2 **Minutes of meeting on 26 August 2009:** were accepted as an accurate record.

2 Update on census preparations

- 2.1 Sandy reported that the Census Order, which detailed the questions for the 2011 Census, had now been approved by the Scottish Parliament. The great majority of the questions recommended initially by GROS remained, though the proposed question on household income had been rejected by MSPs and will not therefore be included in the 2011 Census. The Census Regulations, which set out the detailed arrangements for the census enumeration, were due to be laid before the Scottish Parliament on 21 May.

3 Census Outputs Consultation

- 3.1 Sandy noted that a public consultation on GROS' initial plans for the 2011 Census outputs had been launched in February, with a formal closure date of 14 May. (However, the deadline for responses had since been extended

to the end of May.) A series of roadshow events had been held in April and May - in Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness – to supplement the formal consultation. This had provided lots of useful feedback from users which will be incorporated into the analysis of responses to the consultation. Work on assessing the responses to the consultation and other feedback is scheduled to take place over the summer, with a summary of the findings due to be published on the GROS website in autumn. The next phase will then be to refine and finalise specifications for the main set of 2011 Census outputs, taking into account challenges such as enabling comparable UK-wide outputs, with the aim being to complete this work by May 2011.

- 3.2 The group discussed a summary of the feedback that had been received to date (12 May 2010) on the specific geography-related points that had been included in the outputs consultation.

Consultation Point 5: do you foresee any disadvantages with the proposed general approach to geography described for 2011 Census outputs?

- 3.3 There was an endorsement from the group of the supportive feedback received so far from users about the proposed general approach to geography for 2011 Census outputs, i.e. confirmation that the approach taken for the 2001 Census had worked well and so should be repeated.

Consultation Point 6: are there any additional intermediate geographies for which you would like to have pre-defined census outputs available, and why? Are any of the existing intermediate geographies no longer useful to you?

- 3.4 While school catchment areas had been flagged up by some respondents as a required intermediate geography, it was pointed out that these areas are subject to change over time and so would involve a lot of work to maintain and update. It was therefore concluded that it would be better to leave users to define these for themselves (by aggregating census output areas or SNS data zones) rather than create as a standard intermediate geography – see also 3.11 below.
- 3.5 The group agreed that CHCPs were a useful and worthwhile intermediate to consider; it should be easy enough to create them, e.g. some LA's already equate to the CHCP.
- 3.6 There was a preference to go for multi-member wards as a geography for 2011 instead of the current CAS and ST wards.
- 3.7 Some geographies such as police board areas and Community Justice Authorities were thought simply to be combinations of one or more LA's and so could be left for users to create themselves.
- 3.8 Despite comments from some respondents that settlements and localities are not required, the group argued that localities should be a required geography for 2011 as they provide the best representation of towns and there is a strong user demand within LA's for this type of intermediate geography. Settlements were thought to be a less useful geography and irrelevant to most users.
- 3.9 It was pointed out that post-code sectors, despite being noted as not required by some consultation respondents, are important for migration analysis and for

comparisons over time. The preference was therefore to retain these as an intermediate geography for 2011.

Consultation Point 7: subject to its feasibility, would you find value in having available a small area geography for reporting workplace data, and why?

- 3.10 There had been mixed feedback on the demand for creating a census outputs geography based on workplace address. The majority of respondents said they would not make use of such a geography, though others noted it would be quite useful, albeit not a priority and that the focus should be on the production of outputs for the standard geographies based on usual residence. The group inclined towards this latter viewpoint.

Consultation Point 8: please note any other specific requirements you have in relation to geographical issues for census outputs?

- 3.11 There was agreement with the comments made by a number of consultation respondents that the ability to customise and save new geographies would be a very desirable feature of any new system for disseminating census results. There was also support for the suggestion that LA's be given the opportunity to comment on problematic OAs.
- 3.12 It was agreed that an updated summary of responses to the geography-related consultation points should be circulated to the group once these were all in.

Action 1: Ann-Marie to circulate to the group an updated summary of responses to the geography-related consultation points following closure of the consultation.

Discussion of Identified Issues

4 2011 Census Output Areas

- 4.1 David Blue reported that the system being used to create census output areas (OAs) for 2011 is currently being built, with a target for it being completed and ready for testing by October. The methodology involved is essentially unchanged from that described at the meeting on 26 August 2009: the plan is still to split or merge OAs that fall outwith the thresholds with the resulting shape of these new OAs being a desirable but not essential design criterion. It was noted that users would generally prefer an output geography with boundaries that aligned with physical features such as streets, and that shaping new OAs may be a challenge in areas where existing housing had been demolished and new builds put in with a different street layout.
- 4.2 David noted that GROS intended to consult Local Authority's (LA's) shortly, inviting them to flag up any design problems with the current set of OAs and to suggest improvements based on local knowledge. There was some discussion about who should be the relevant LA people to approach – depending on the individual LA, planners, Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (SNS) users all potentially had an interest. It was also suggested that academics and other interested parties be invited to take part in the consultation; ScotStat was mentioned as an ideal

mechanism for identifying such people. It was agreed that there would also be benefit in tying in this consultation with the forthcoming consultation about SNS datazones.

- 4.3 There was a query whether GROS would be willing to visit LA's who lack geographical expertise to help review output area and other boundaries within their area. Sandy confirmed that if there was sufficient demand for this kind of help then it would be something that could be arranged. He also stressed that, with over 45,000 OAs in total, it would only be feasible to accommodate design changes to a relatively small percentage.
- 4.4 Another suggestion was that it might be helpful to issue guidance with the consultation on how authorities could assess their boundaries by using data they collect, such as housing land audits, to identify where future housing development will be. It was suggested this would be a better starting point and less resource intensive than GROS having to go out to LAs.

5 Settlement/Locality Boundaries

- 5.1 Sandy noted that the plan remained to use 2011 Census data on postcode population and household counts to produce updated settlement and locality boundaries, which would then feed into the OA creation process.
- 5.2 The latest (mid-2008) population estimates for settlements/localities were released by GROS in March 2010. Sandy suggested that Alan Sloan take an action point to clarify what boundary information had been used for these statistics and report back to the group.

Action 2: Alan Sloan to clarify the latest boundary information currently available on settlements/ localities and report back to the group.

6 Frozen Geography

- 6.1 Sandy confirmed that the GROS receives quarterly updates of the Postcode Address File (PAF). For the 2011 Census, the plan remains to take an initial freeze of the underlying postcode geography based on the October 2010 PAF, and then a final freeze incorporating any changes from the January 2011 PAF update.

7 Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (SNS) Data Zones

- 7.1 Euan noted that a user consultation on the redesign of SNS datazones is due to be held this summer. The current preferred approach is to split and merge datazones that are no longer within the minimum and maximum thresholds, but users will be consulted on this, along with alternative options. Datazones will either be redrawn –
 - a) prior to the 2011 Census and based on the population estimates, which carries a risk that if there are significant differences between the census results and the population estimates then a further redraw will be required, or
 - b) after the census results become available.
- 7.2 It was pointed out that there are around half a dozen “holes” in the current set of datazones – St Marys Loch for example – and it would be helpful if these could be addressed as part of any redesign.

- 7.3 It was noted that it will be important to state within the consultation document what implications suggested changes to datazones may have on the statistics, particularly in relation to time series, as not all users may have a full appreciation of this.
- 7.4 There was a query about whether datazone boundaries could be changed automatically to reflect any LA authority boundary changes. Matt noted that LA boundaries change very rarely, and even if they did change there are no plans just now to change the existing datazone boundaries as continuity for the latter was judged to be a more important consideration.

8 Standard Codings for Geography Areas

- 8.1 Matt reported that the Scottish Government was due to issue a paper on this topic to users in the next few weeks, with further guidance to follow. This would provide details of the new UK-wide standard geographic coding system and the impact this will have for users. He noted that in practice some of the new codes are already in use throughout Scotland.
- 8.2 There was some discussion about the desirability of the new datazone codes being sequenced so that they could be more easily aggregated to areas for analysis, e.g. in relation to different parts of a local authority area. Matt noted that the coding system for SNS datazones will not contain geographical intelligence embedded within the code itself. However, he pointed out that local authority users often create their own names for datazones in their area, and if enough of them do this then these labels could be incorporated into the official coding system.

9 Statistical Disclosure Control (SDC) Methodology

- 9.1 Sandy informed the group that the pre-tabular record swapping SDC has been signed off as the method to be used throughout the UK for the 2011 Census. He noted that a lot of work was now being done by ONS on the detail of how this methodology will be applied to the different types of output products.

10 ONS Census Geography Work

- 10.1 Sandy reported that the ONS Geography Working Group had been meeting on a regular basis, with GROS representation. While its remit related to geographical issues for England & Wales only, there were some issues affecting Scotland, e.g. correctly aligning the ONS and GROS geography boundaries on the Scottish/English border.
- 10.2 Sandy also noted that ONS had recently completed a formal round of consultation with users on census geography. Evaluation of responses to this consultation is due to conclude in July, and Sandy undertook to circulate the findings to the group once these became available.

Action 3: Sandy to circulate the findings of the ONS consultation on census geography to the group once these became available.

11 Other issues

11.1 It was noted that the Local Government Boundary Commission (LGBC) has now completed its review of Dundee.

11.2 There is a meeting of the PAMS Committee on Monday 17 May.

12 AOB

12.1 No other business was raised.

13 Date of next meeting

13.1 To be confirmed.

**GROS Census Division
May 2010**