

## Advisory Group Paper AG (02) 08

**2001 CENSUS ADVISORY GROUPS****Neighbourhood Statistics - Summary of User Consultation Research****Introduction**

1. At the last round of Advisory Group meetings ONS briefly reported on a Neighbourhood Statistics user consultation exercise, which aimed to build a wider understanding of the needs of key data users. This paper presents, for information, a summary report of the outcome of the consultation.

**Action**

2. **Advisory Group members are asked to note the summary findings.**

**Method of Research**

3. The research was commissioned by ONS and carried out by a market research company in February and March 2002. An initial round of qualitative research was done using structured focus groups. This was followed by a quantitative telephone survey of 352 people spread across a range of job roles.
4. **Advisory Group members are asked to note that the results of this study have not yet been fully analysed.** Indeed, there will be scope for further interpretation of the detailed results over time. Also, while the sample is large, the representation of individual sectors is small in some cases. The sample is a composite and has not been weighted - so some caution needs to be exercised in reading too much into detailed percentages. However, the results do provide a good feel for the needs of users.
5. In many cases the research confirmed the assumptions and understanding embodied in the business requirements documentation.
6. There is a wealth of detail in the study that bears detailed scrutiny by those involved with the design and development of the NeSS.
7. The study focused on the needs of users of NeSS, but it was not possible to do this without discussing the data the service might provide. Therefore a side-effect of this is that the study contains significant information on the data needs and wishes of a wide range of potential users of the NeSS.

## Qualitative research approach

8. In February/March four focus groups were convened: Two were in Birmingham comprising representatives from local government (with emphasis on planning and policy) and the health sector; and two were in London covering central government and, again, local government (this time with emphasis on housing and social services).
9. Respondents were very positive about the Neighbourhood Statistics concept, but a number of issues arose:
  - there is an increasing need for small area analysis to support bids for targeted funding;
  - the key users would be in local government and the health sector rather than central government, whose requirement is more occasional;
  - there is increasing sophistication in the types of analyses being conducted by some parts of local government;
  - users suggested that the key topics of interest are population, deprivation and ethnicity;
  - there is a clear local government need for data below ward level;
  - health sector users have additional problems of boundary change and GP's list populations\*;
  - central government is more likely to want data for areas that might be affected by policy rather than focus on local areas in depth;
  - there is seen to be a role for National Statistics to act as a portal to users' requirements;
  - there is a demand for National Statistics to provide a consistent statistical product, making it easier to know what might be available and ensuring consistent definitions;
  - users think that National Statistics should be influencing other government departments to not make unreasonable demands for information;
  - users feel that the Internet is driving increased expectations from their users and that ONS needs to increase its speed of response;

\* GPs serve populations registered with them but these are not based on precise catchment areas.

- e-mail based alerting services and the ability to save queries were very popular, particularly with local government and health sector users; having a personalised interface attracted least interest\*; and
- with more data being opened up to less experienced users, robustness will be important.

10. The groups provided an insight into the kinds of analyses that users might want to run, and they also suggested that amongst professional users the delivery of tabular data was perhaps more important than features such as graphics or mapping.

\* The site has a facility, as part of the general ONS services, for users to register (from banner headline at top of site), and those who have registered to receive alerts to new changes to the site, new data releases, etc.

### **Quantitative research approach**

11. Some 352 telephone interviews were conducted in April 2002 covering:

- policy officers/ analysts/ researchers;
- 'active citizens';
- academics;
- local journalists;
- local authority department head/ senior civil servants; and
- information offices/ librarians / 'information intermediaries' drawn from local and central government, health sector and with a regional spread across England.

12. All responders were users or providers of local areas statistics in their organisations and had Internet access. The following points of interest emerged.

#### *Market needs:*

13. Local government respondents had different priorities for the data they wanted to be able to use from the other groups, such as MPs' researchers, media and active citizens. This might become an issue in managing the expectations of the various user groups.

14. There were varied opinions as to what a 'neighbourhood' means to users of such data, that is, what size of area is involved. Perceptions included 'estates' or 'a number of streets within a postcode'.
15. Respondents were asked whether Neighbourhood Statistics should prioritise offering more data down to a sub-ward level, or increase the breadth and quality of data at a ward level. Most (57%) thought that both tasks should be prioritised.

#### *Desired characteristics of the site*

16. For policy analysts, downloadability and printability are key functions, whilst other functions tend to be seen as nice to have rather than essential. For less advanced users, such as citizens, and information providers, tools such as graphics and mapping are seen as important. This might create an issue in the future if the Programme has to prioritise the functionality the site will deliver.
17. Compatibility of the NeSS with the users own GIS systems is seen to be an important issue.

#### *Potential usage of the site*

18. Overall reactions to the concept as presented are very favourable, with a high level of interest.
19. There is confirmation that if the service begins to fulfil expectations, then there can be significant numbers of users within organisations, particularly local authorities, who were most likely to expect there to be 6 - 15 users within their organisation.
20. Local government respondents were more likely to think their organisations would have regular or daily use for the service. Local government respondents were more likely to use local area statistics on a daily basis, particularly information officers.

#### *Use of statistical web sites*

21. Most respondents (70%) used a statistical web site of some kind. Some 43% of the sample already used [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk) and 7% had used the Neighbourhood Statistics pages. Typically, at least 6 out of 10 local government respondents were already using the ONS site.

#### *Respondents' technical resources*

22. Nearly all (97%) had Internet access in the workplace, of whom 98% had desktop access.
23. Whilst there are only a small number of potential users who are not running a Windows operating system, these tend to be concentrated in the important media

sector. The possibility of making the system compatible with Apple Macintosh needs to be reviewed.

24. The majority of respondents (86%) used Internet Explorer as their web-browser; 31% of users were using version 5 and 16% version 5.5. Only 8% were using Netscape; these tended to be academics.
25. Most respondents (84%) were allowed to download files from the Internet. Some 14% of these respondents thought there was a size limit on the files they could download, although most were unsure of the restriction.

#### *Trends/time series data*

26. The majority of respondents (88%) said they needed to look at trends in local area data. Some 42% of these respondents typically needed to look back 2 - 5 years and 30% 6 - 9 years.
27. Ward and local authority disaggregation were the most commonly used levels for trend analysis (used by 58% and 51% of those using trends/time series data respectively); a third used regional trend analysis.

#### *GIS usage*

28. Over half the sample (58%) were familiar with the concept of geographically reference data. Over a third (39%) of the total sample currently have their own GIS - and 4 out of 5 local government respondents had their own GIS. Most of those who have a GIS would want to combine Neighbourhood Statistics data with their own for mapping (88%).
29. Most respondents (71%) thought it very important to be able to search using a subject index, with site maps showing headings and sub-headings.

#### *Added value services*

30. E-mail based alerting services and the ability to save queries were very popular, particularly with local government and health sector users. Having a personalised interface attracted the least interest.
31. Most respondents (72%) were interested in the facility to produce reports from the site. Over half wanted both a combination of standard pages with preset values and the ability to tailor layouts. Many commented that this provision would provide them with greater flexibility.

*Training and support*

32. Overall, respondents were most interested in the idea of e-mail support, with same day response. Telephone support lines were also deemed important.
33. There was interest in providing training on NeSS from local government respondents, but not from elsewhere.
34. There was little overall interest in consultancy on statistical analysis.

**Further information**

35. Further details of the research are given in a set of slides from a presentation given recently on the outcome of the consultation research and which is available from the Advisory Group Secretary *margaret.wort@ons.gov.uk*.

**Richard Potter**  
**Neighbourhood Statistics Stakeholder Manager**  
**ONS**  
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