



## CENSUS ADVISORY GROUP PAPER

AG(02)17

### CENSUS AND SMALL AREA DATA DEVELOPMENT OVER THE NEXT DECADE

#### **Introduction**

*This paper is for information and to inform Census Advisory Group members of planned work on reviewing Census and Small Area Data Development over the next decade and to provide the opportunity to discuss wider involvement in the programme.*

#### **Action**

**Advisory Group members are asked to:**

- **note the timetable for the development programme;**
- **comment on the suggested re-focusing of the Advisory Group in relation to the programme;**
- **agree that the plan should be taken ahead; and**
- **consider how Advisory Group membership may be extended to ensure that the best mix of user input is available to the programme.**

#### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The Neighbourhood Statistics initiative is developing a wide range of datasets which will be presented at the smallest possible area level over the coming years (see Paper AG(02)16). The addition of output from the 2001 Census will be the first major step forward in the provision of small area data for the system and this will be followed by the addition of other datasets as they come on stream. In addition, part of the PAT18 recommendations included a review of the requirement for a 2006 Census.
- 1.2 As Advisory Group members will know a report on the requirement for a 2006 Census was prepared and the key recommendation was that a 2006 Census should not be carried out, but that other ways should be exploring for providing the equivalent data. This view was endorsed by the National Statistician and Ministers.

- 1.3 In addition, the 2001 Census will be reviewed to produce an evaluation of the methodology and recommendations of possible changes for the future.
- 1.4 In order to ensure that this work is done in a co-ordinated way, a programme will be launched to integrate these different activities so that they are all considered as part of a general development plan for small area social statistics over the next decade.

## **2. Outline of Programme Plan**

- 2.1 The planned activity can be considered as a 3-phase approach to planning for the provision of small area data over the next decade and up to the time of a possible 2011 Census. The first stage will be the provision of aggregate administrative data and 2001 Census data via the Neighbourhood Statistics system. This stage also includes the modelling of survey data to produce some data, such as income, at smaller area levels than are currently available from survey data. It also includes a review of the potential for producing ward based population estimates. This programme is dynamic and will evolve over the decade to ensure that time series data is produced and that, as new requirements are identified, potential additional datasets are examined and brought into the system where it is viable to do so.
- 2.2 The second phase of the programme will be to have a series of research projects looking at alternatives to population and housing census. This work will include a review of current methods, an exploration of potential new methods, and an examination of the methodology on how the data is collected; it will also include an assessment of technical and information system changes that could contribute to the process.
- 2.3 This will be an ongoing exercise that will continue throughout the decade, but its first phase will report, by September 2003, on a number of high-level issues such as: the use of administrative data in a census environment; optional methods of collecting the data; and revised conventional methods. It will produce a plan for carrying out further research into all or some of these methods. This links to a long-term development plan for a census or replacement by 2011. It will include the potential for linking administrative datasets, the introduction of the planned integrated social survey – details of which are being developed at the moment, but which, because of its size and design, will provide more information than existing separate surveys. Modelling will also be continued. Taken together these activities will evolve into a social statistics model that will create outputs from a variety of detailed sources.
- 2.4 The final and last phase would be a design for a 2011 Census or replacement.

### **3. Advisory Group input**

- 3.1 The plan is to retain the Advisory Group structure that has served the Census well over the past decade, but to widen the scope of the meetings in order to include a focus on the Census and Small Area Data programme. There will be a much higher degree of correlation between the different aspects of the programme within ONS and it is important that user input is brought together in the same way to support the work.
- 3.2 The change is likely to require a wide ranging input from users and it is proposed that the Advisory Group membership should be reviewed in this light to ensure that the best mix of user input is available to the programme. ONS will help to drive this process, but it would be helpful if Advisory Group members could consider and suggest how this may be achieved.
- 3.3 As the programme moves through its different phases over the decade, input may be required on a variety of topics, including:
- user needs for small area data;
  - identification of potential Administrative Sources or local survey data;
  - standards for data collection, data classifications and harmonisation;
  - geography;
  - methodology for modelling survey data/administrative data to lower levels of disaggregation; and
  - dissemination.
- 3.4 **Members are asked to:**
- **note the timetable for the development programme;**
  - **comment on the suggested re-focusing of the Advisory Group in relation to the programme;**
  - **agree that the plan should be taken ahead; and**
  - **consider how Advisory Group membership may be extended to ensure that the best mix of user input is available to the programme.**

**A M CLARK**  
**28 October 2002**