

## **Scottish Census Steering Committee**

### **Minutes of Meeting**

**25 October 2010**

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Minutes of the Scottish Census Steering Committee (SCSC) meeting held on Monday 25 October 2010 by General Register Office for Scotland (GROS), New Register House, Edinburgh.

**Present:**

Duncan Macniven	GROS, Registrar General
Peter Scrimgeour	GROS, Director of Census
Shirley Cameron	GROS, Census Field Operations Branch
Rona Dunbar	GROS, Communications Manager
Ed Turnbull	GROS, Statistics Information Systems Manager
Prof. Ken MacKinnon	Bòrd na Gàidhlig
Matt Lancashire	Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations
Ken Macdonald	Information Commissioner's Office
Jenny Boag	RSS Statistics User Forum
Helen Martin	Scottish Trade Union Congress
Ros Micklem	Equalities and Human Rights Commission
Dr Eric Baijal	NHS Borders
Prof. David Martin	The University of Southampton
Ken Macdonald	Information Commissioner's Office

**Apologies:**

Grahame Smith	Scottish Trade Union Congress
Anne Moises	Scottish Government
Ranald Mair	Scottish Care
Jalal Chaudry	Scottish Council for Muslims
Jon Harris	CoSLA
Alan Dickson	Capability Scotland
Prof. Michael Anderson	The University of Edinburgh

## **1. Welcome and introductions – Duncan Macniven**

- 1.1 Duncan welcomed everyone to the meeting. Duncan explained that since the last meeting Consumer Focus Scotland had resigned from the SCSC, due to resource issues. They had felt able to do this as their interests were well represented by the other groups who attended the forum. Duncan welcomed Matt Lancashire and Helen Martin representing Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) and Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) respectively. Members were thanked for their previous input and for their continued interest.

## **2. Minutes of the of Meeting – 29 June – Duncan Macniven**

The minutes were approved and will be published on the GROS website.

## **3. Matters arising from 29 June minutes**

- 3.2 Statistical Disclosure Control – Satisfactory progress was continuing to be made in the techniques for anonymising the statistics from the census before they were published.
- 3.3 Community Engagement Update – The 22 Census Regional Managers were now in post and a key aspect of their role would be to engage with groups at a local community level. Duncan explained that a recent meeting with ethnic minority groups had shown that they would be happy to share census information around their communities. Valuable practical solutions had been suggested which could help members of their communities fill in the questionnaire, such as arranging help for groups with the same language need to fill in together with peer support to help with translation.

## **4. 2011 Census Programme – Progress Report – Duncan Macniven**

- 4.1 Duncan reported that planning was generally progressing well. The few problems encountered were being overcome with sensible solutions being developed.
- 4.2 The impact of the Spending Review on the 2011 Census budget had still to be decided and may include paring back on some aspects of planned expenditure, perhaps around publicity, but not to an extent which endangered the quality of the census outputs.

## **5. Publicity Plans – Progress Report – Rona Dunbar**

- 5.1 Rona reported that recent focus had been on working with the 22 Census Regional Managers, providing media training and assisting them in the preparation of their local area action plans which would include looking at the audiences and groups who may require support in their areas. Ros Micklem asked what evidence was used to identify groups requiring support. Rona explained that evidence from the 2001 Census findings of hard to count groups which had been poorly enumerated, in addition to geographical areas which were known to be challenging.

5.2 The wider publicity campaign was also progressing and Rona had been developing key messages. Rona would share the key messages with SCSC members and would welcome any comments and feedback.

**Action: Rona Dunbar**

5.3 Local action plans would focus on particular groups identified locally by Census Regional Managers and additional key messages would be developed for these groups.

5.4 The Scotland's Census website was expected to become available to the public on 25 October 2010.

## **6. 2011 Census Outputs – Demonstration of System – Ed Turnbull**

6.1 Ed explained that SCROL was used as the dissemination tool for the 2001 Census results. It was not feasible to re-use it for 2011 Census output, due to the inherent limitations in its design. There was, therefore an opportunity to develop a system which would meet the increased expectations of users of census data. From analysis three different types of users had been identified:

- Data tourist – a casual user requiring easy access to perhaps one or two statistics. Examples include a school child working on a project or a constituent writing to their MSP.
- Data analyst – usually a professional user, preparing to spend far more time specifying their requirements. Often requiring fairly complex tables, and would like the ability to define their own table structures and geographic areas.
- Data miner – a professional user interested in harvesting large volumes of outputs for further processing in their own systems. Examples include demographic research companies and academic institutions.

6.2 Ed demonstrated the system, in the terms of each identified user type. He explained that it was not a prototype, as a procurement exercise was currently underway to source the software and therefore the system being demonstrated might look quite different to the final system. The functionality would be broadly in line with what had been demonstrated.

6.3 Data tourist user – Ed demonstrated the usability of the tables, which would provide a more interactive experience for the user than SCROL had done. It was designed around feedback received on users' requirements gathered during the consultation process. Improved technical solutions would allow creative uses of geography for mapping purposes.

6.4 Data analyst user – The solution would be a more sophisticated table building service with the capability for users to build their own tables, in addition to those created by GROS. There would also be the ability to save work done if users register using a username and password to access information. This was a similar solution to those provided by other countries, notably Australia. Work was also on-going to consider the pre-defined tables which would be provided.

- 6.5 Data miner user – The intention would be to provide a series of “data cubes” containing all the census data. A user would be able to select from a list of variables pertinent to the cube chosen. Information and the resulting table could then be saved and viewed as a map or a chart.
- 6.6 The aspiration for the solution in 2011 would be to also include the results from the 2001 Census for comparability purposes. The name of the 2011 system had still to be decided.
- 6.7 Dave Martin requested a copy of a PowerPoint presentation on the proposed system and Ed agreed to provide this to all members with a caveat that the system had still to be procured and the final solution could look quite different, though with a similar functionality.

**Action: Ed Turnbull**

- 6.8 Members asked how comparable results would be made available across the UK. Duncan explained that all three census departments had agreed that harmonised outputs would be made available at a UK level and this work was being taken forward by ONS. GROS would give access to anonymised data in a format which would allow ONS to use this to provide harmonised UK outputs.
- 6.9 Duncan explained that the results of the consultation on outputs were now available on the GROS website. The volume and value of the comments was useful and were appreciated. Plans could not however be finalised until after the Spending Review had set the budget for 2012-13.

## **7. Beyond 2011 – Discussion – Duncan Macniven**

- 7.1 Duncan introduced the discussion and posed the question what should happen to the way in which socio-demographic statistics are provided after the outputs from the 2011 Census had been published. Should the good progress made since the 2001 Census be continued into a census in 2021 or should the drawbacks of the traditional census, including the length of time between surveys and the time taken to publish results as well as cost, indicate a revisit of thinking on how census-type data could be collected in the future? Duncan commented that the Government Statement, published in December 2008, concluded with a paragraph about how to meet the future user need for statistical information traditionally provided in a census on a wide range of topics and for small areas and population groups.
- 7.2 ONS had now been allocated a budget to investigate the scope for a replacement system to provide accurate demographic statistics beyond the 2011 Census. A decision on whether or not that would replace the 2021 Census would be expected in 2015. Members were asked for their initial thoughts and were encouraged to provide comment. Comments were discussed as follows:
- The census was currently the only source of some information, notably data from the language and health questions.

- The census was currently the only source of small area data. Alternative sources may not be based on unique small area geography which could impact on data estimation and modelling.
- It was unknown if data matching of alternative sources would be a viable alternative and this might not be known in sufficient time for a decision to be made on a future census unless investigation and feasibility commenced very soon. The cost to achieve a similar reach as the census was also unknown. Proof of concept work should start now on administrative data sources feasibility as any delay could impact on the availability of an alternative in 2021. A decision point would be required to consider the feasibility of alternative sources or if a shorter or different census would be required.
- The length of time between censuses was too long; data became less valuable for planning purposes towards the end of the cycle. There was a trade off between frequency and small area data and it would be more valuable if a census type operation was held more frequently.
- A rolling census (similar to the French style) would not provide the snapshot of information provided by the census for small areas.
- Some questions can be asked in no other way than by asking in the census and may not be suitable for data matching.
- Data matching may raise some public concerns about data protection issues which would have to be managed.
- There may be public concerns about the reliability of data available from private sources not governed by public sector regulation or policy. Public sector databases could be viewed as having more rigorous audit requirements.
- Collection from administrative data sources could also be seen as more intrusive.
- As census data was used for promoting equality issues by public authorities, the valid correlation of different categories of information would be key if this data was going to be taken from different sources. Further investigation would be required to establish if a valid conclusion could be drawn from the different source information which could currently be drawn from the census.
- It was important to establish what users want, including professional stakeholders' requirements.
- Any new system must be capable of providing consistent UK-level outputs.
- Duncan explained that work had been progressing on the degree of data matching and feasibility of computer matching. Further public debate would be required, to establish what users wanted.

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**8. Any other business – Duncan Macniven**

8.1 No other items were discussed.

**9. Date of the next meeting**

9.1 The next meeting would be held after the census. Members would be canvassed for an appropriate date. Peter thanked members for their continued input to date and encouraged continued comment, particularly around publicity key messages and community liaison action plans.

**General Register Office for Scotland**

**November 2010**