

# SCOTTISH POPULATION SURVEYS CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

8 July 2009, 14:00 pm to 17:00 pm

Conference Room A, St Andrews House, Edinburgh

## MINUTES

### Present:

Diana Wilkinson, Chief Researcher (Chair)  
Rob Wishart, Chief Statistician  
Alex Stannard, Survey Harmonisation Working Group  
Anita Morrison, Longitudinal Research and Analysis Network  
David Gordon, representing the public health community  
Kirsty MacLachlan, General Register Office  
Neil Bannister, Office of National Statistics  
Sara Grainger (minutes)

### Apologies:

Mark McAteer, Improvement Service  
Helen Fogarty, Survey Managers Network

### 1. Welcome and introductions

Diana welcomed every-one to the newly shaped SPSCC and noted the apologies.

### 2. Minutes from meeting on 28 May 2009

The minutes were approved and the actions were checked as follows:

ALEX STANNARD TO CIRCULATE DRAFT OUTPUT STRATEGY FOR COMMENT	Complete
ALEX STANNARD TO ENSURE THE KNOWLEDGE ATTITUDES AND MOTIVATIONS MODULE IS GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE A WRITTEN UPDATE TO THE SPSCC IN FUTURE	Will be complete at next meeting when survey updates will be provided
INCLUDE SHS STEERING GROUP IN SURVEY CO-ORDINATION STRUCTURE	Will be completed when the steering group is established
ALEX STANNARD TO PROVIDE MORE GUIDANCE WHEN REQUESTING SURVEY UPDATES FOR THE SPSCC	Will be complete at next meeting when survey updates will be provided
ALEX STANNARD TO CIRCULATE KIRSTY MACLEAN'S CENSUS 2011 UPDATE PAPER	Complete
NEIL BOWIE TO CIRCULATE PAPERS.	Complete
DIANA WILKINSON TO PROVIDE MORE DETAIL ON LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH FOR THE LTS BACKGROUND NOTE	Complete

HELEN FOGARTY TO PROVIDE DETAILS ON THE DATA ISSUES DISCUSSED AT THE SURVEY MANAGERS NETWORK DATA EVENT	Complete
ALEX STANNARD TO CIRCULATE FINALISED CORE QUESTIONS	Complete
ALEX TO INCORPORATE AGREED CHANGES INTO THE LTS AND PUBLISH ON THE WEBSITE	Complete
ALEX TO REFLECT LINK TO ASD HEADS IN SURVEY CO-ORDINATION STRUCTURE	Diana and Rob will manage this through ASD heads meetings
HELEN TO PROVIDE THE REMIT OF SURVEY MANAGERS NETWORK	Complete
ALEX TO REFLECT LINKS TO SCOTTISH HOUSEHOLD SURVEY STEERING GROUP IN SURVEY CO-ORDINATION STRUCTURE	Complete
ALEX TO FINALISE THE REMITS OF THE SPSCC AND THE SPSWG	To be discussed under item 3

### **3. Remit of the restructured Scottish Population Surveys Co-ordinating Committee – paper SPSCC/09/04**

The following changes to the draft remit were suggested:

- Clarity that the overarching aims of the SPSCC are aligned with those of the long term survey strategy
- Draft point 1 to be extended with “.. and their contribution to policy”
- Draft point 7 to be moved to be point 3 to sit alongside the other overarching points
- Draft point 5 to be reworded to better reflect the way the Longitudinal Research Network functions
- Draft point 8 to be reworded to clarify that this is about the SPSCC taking a strategic overview of survey activity to address the perception that surveys spring up across Government without any-one really taking an overview, and not about quality control of detailed survey procedures.
- A definition of ‘population and household surveys’ is required to help clarify the scope of this committee. Business surveys, school surveys are excluded, longitudinal, ad-hoc, national, sub-national, surveys of individuals or households are included. Some detail on which surveys are directly influenced by the committee and which are just ‘in the frame’ and need to be considered would be helpful.

**ACTION:** Alex Stannard to provide a working definition of surveys to be considered under the remit of the SPSCC

**ACTION:** Alex Stannard to revise the draft remit and circulate to all committee members for further comment.

### **4. Inclusion of sexual orientation in the harmonised core – paper SPSCC/09/05**

The recommendation that sexual orientation be added to the core set of questions as mandatory was accepted by the committee.

David noted that the paper says all other equality strands are currently included in the core but that this is not strictly true as transgender is excluded.

ACTION: Alex Stannard to feedback the point to Social Justice Statistics

## **5. Links with the Improving Local Indicators Project**

Sara Grainger briefly described the background to the Improving Local Indicators Project (ILIP) which aims to improve the availability of data suitable for measuring progress towards outcomes at a local level for use in Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs). The project is being lead by the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and is managed by a project board on which Rob Wishart and Mark McAteer, both on this committee, sit.

To date, the project has produced nine discussion papers covering different policy themes and there have been 3 consultation events to gather views on them. Consultation will be continuing over the summer.

Sara reported that 1 in 5 of the indicators in the Improvement Service's menu are from national surveys and a great deal of indicators being used in SOAs are from LA run resident's surveys. There has been some informal conversations around the need for improved co-ordination of local surveys or possibly an SOA module or survey at a national level. Sara Grainger asked for comments from the committee on these ideas and on how the SPSCC and the ILIP Project Board can most effectively join up on these issues.

Diana Wilkinson wondered if a more co-ordinated approach for local surveys would require local government to pool resources, and Anita Morrison asked if resource issues were driving the process. Sara Grainger and Rob Wishart explained that the main driver of the process was a desire for comparability across local authorities but there are many other issues such as quality, burden, response rates and the availability of contractors. There are also a lot of data gaps and a perception that the only way to get outcome data is through surveys. The project will also consider if existing national surveys deliver what local government needs. Rob commented that the Scottish Government has harmonised rather than integrated its own surveys because of the practical difficulties of integration which would be even greater across local government.

Diana Wilkinson commented that the Scottish Government often controls the market through its large surveys meaning local government do not get access to the major survey companies.

David Gordon noted that it had taken 10 years for Health Boards to deal with these sorts of issues, and asked if the Scottish Household Survey could adapt to better incorporate the interests of Local Authorities. Rob Wishart noted that the Scottish Household Survey could deal with some of the issues but was unlikely to ever entirely

meet the all the needs of local government. The importance of the SHS review and the need to feed in issues arising from this project was agreed.

Diana Wilkinson asked if the ILIP would come up with recommendations that the committee could consider. Sara Grainger said some recommendations may be ready in advance of the Autumn 2009 SPSCC meeting and that she would provide an update at that meeting.

ACTION: Sara Grainger to provide an update on survey issues arising from the Improving Local Indicators Project for consideration at the next SPSCC meeting.

## **6. National and Local Surveys during Census 2011**

Alex informed the committee that ONS were looking for views on a possible moratorium on all social surveys for a three month period in 2011 while the Census is undertaken.

Neil said as far as he was aware all ONS surveys will be continuing as normal but that he would check the situation and report back.

The committee considered that a 3 month moratorium was unacceptable but that, with sufficient forward planning, the major SG surveys could be asked to stop field work for 3 weeks following Census Day (27 March 2011), any-one planning ad-hoc surveys could be asked to avoid that period and that the suggestion of a 3 week moratorium could be put to local authorities, health boards and other public bodies. This would be beneficial for both surveys and the census as members of the public may feel overburdened at this time and response rates could suffer as a consequence.

ACTION: Alex Stannard to speak seek Survey Managers views on the possibility of a 3 week break in fieldwork in 2011

ACTION: Rob Wishart to contact public bodies

## **7. Delivery Plan for the Long Term Strategy for Population Surveys in Scotland 2009 – 2019 – paper SPSCC/09/06**

Alex introduced the draft workplan and asked for comments on gaps, priorities and resources and reported that the Survey Managers Network were concerned about the number of items they were identified as being contributors too. Alex also told the committee that Helen Fogarty had contracted him to suggest that the item on metadata be given high priority. The committee agreed this was an important piece of work but probably not an immediate priority for the first 6 months of work.

Diana noted that improved analysis and dissemination were not covered in detail in the delivery plan. Anita reported that people who attended the Evaluation Summer School were very keen that SG should make more of its secondary analysis publicly available and easily accessible. Kirsty reported that similar points had been made at the Aging Conference and Rob concurred that this is an area SG analysts need to improve on.

The possibility of packaging survey data on a themed basis, particularly in relation to Single Outcome Agreements, could be useful. This could be linked to the Social

Research Knowledge Portal and/or the High Level Summary of Statistics, both of which were initiatives designed to increase the accessibility of evidence.

Alex asked whether the Social Research Group have a network analogous to the Statistics Group Dissemination Network; Diana confirmed that there is a Communications Working Group. Alex suggested that the two groups could work together on this issue.

Kirsty suggested that the ScotStat Conference could be used to gather user views.

**ACTION:** Sara Grainger to raise possibility of discussing dissemination at the ScotStat conference with the conference organising group.

**ACTION:** Alex Stannard to contact the chairs of both the social research and statistics networks on dissemination to propose some level of joined up working.

**ACTION:** Anita Morrison to draft a proposal for producing themed based papers on survey data to be discussed with Analytical Service Divisions, with support from Sara Grainger.

The committee considered each of the items in the draft delivery plan in turn and agreed that the following items were considered to be the immediate priorities for the first 6 months:

- **Completing the core harmonised questions.** This is a priority because many other strands of the strategy depend on it and completion of the questions could be very useful to all public bodies conducting surveys.
- **Procurement Review.** This is a priority given that the next round of procurement will be in 2010, all the major SG surveys will be procuring around the same time and a co-ordinated approach is very much needed. A review of procurement will be taken forward by OCR and the potential to employ a procurement officer on a fixed-term basis to manage procurement for all the major surveys will be considered.
- **Investigating the costs and benefits of clustering in surveys.** This is a priority for feeding into the SHS review and informing the next round of survey procurement

It was also discussed that looking at the overlap between the major SG surveys and identifying any data gaps and investigating coding conventions could be usefully done by a summer student or intern so could be completed this year.

Neil suggested that the length of time for developing a robust methodology for combining samples should not be underestimated as the work could well take a couple of months.

All these points and other minor comments on the delivery plan will be incorporated into the final version.

**ACTION:** Alex Stannard to revise the delivery plan in light of comments, making clear what the priorities are and how they relate to the long term aims of the strategy.

**ACTION:** Diana Wilkinson to arrange for the procurement review to be lead by a member of Office of the Chief Researcher and progress the work.

**ACTION:** Alex Stannard to liaise with Rob Wishart and OCR about getting an intern for the summer.

ACTION: Alex Stannard to progress the work on completing harmonised core questions and clustering in surveys to report back at the next SPSCC meeting.

## **8. Any Other Business**

Alex informed the group that the ONS Methods and Harmonisation Tool for surveys is likely to be tested by one survey manager before the possibility of it being fully adopted by SG is considered.

Diana thanked every-one for their contributions.

The next meeting of the SPSCC is likely to be in November 2009.