

SCOTTISH POPULATION SURVEYS CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

28th MAY 2009 MINUTES

Present

Rob Wishart	- Strategy and Ministerial Support Directorate (Chair)
Diana Wilkinson	- Strategy and Ministerial Support Directorate
David Hazle	- Glasgow City Council
Helen Fogarty	- DG Justice and Communities
Coryn Barclay	- Fife Council
Sonnda Catto	- NHS Scotland
David McPhee	- DG Justice and Communities
Shona Rennie	- DG Justice and Communities
Tom Spencer	- DG Justice and Communities
Ian Mate	- DG Justice and Communities
Mairi Spowage	- Strategy and Ministerial Support Directorate
Nic Krzyzanowski	- DG Justice and Communities
Julie Goodlet-Rowley	- DG Economy
Neil Bowie	- General Register Office for Scotland
Sara Grainger	- Strategy and Ministerial Support Directorate
Alex Stannard	- Strategy and Ministerial Support Directorate
Dette Cowden	- Strategy and Ministerial Support Directorate

Apologies

Kirsty MacLean (General Register Office for Scotland), Kirsty MacLachlan (General Register Office for Scotland), Ganka Mueller (General Register Office for Scotland), David Smith (DG Education), Denise Patrick (DG Education), Barry Stalker (Strategy and Ministerial Support Directorate), Donner Easterlow (DG Economy), Julie Ramsay (DG Health), Sinead Power (DG Education), David Hurst (DG Economy)

Welcome and introductions

1. Rob Wishart thanked members for attending. The minutes from the previous meeting were agreed. Rob Wishart provided an update on the actions of the previous meeting.

ONS Integrated Household Survey update

2. Nina Parry-Langdon joined the meeting via audio link and updated members on the Integrated Household Survey (IHS). The project to develop the Survey Case Management System has been stopped over concerns about the length of time taken to develop a system that might soon be obsolete. In addition, there is a wide review of data collection methods across both business and social surveys in ONS. The IHS has gone ahead and the Labour Force Survey was adopted as a module in April 2009. The Life Opportunity Survey will be introduced in June. The surveys integrated into the IHS are the Labour Force Survey, English Housing Survey, Living Cost and Food Survey, General Lifestyle Survey and the Opinions Survey.

3. There are plans to review the IHS core to reduce its length as it stands at 100 questions. The work will look at harmonising the core with the European Programme of Social Surveys. The size of the IHS core is a pressing issue for the Opinions Survey and is limiting the amount of other information that can be collected. From October the Opinions Survey will have a reduced core. The first datasets from the IHS are expected in September 2010 and will contain data based on 370,000 interviews. The output strategy is being developed and will be consulted on in June 2009.
4. Nina clarified that no final decisions have been made on the size of the core for the Opinions Survey.

ACTION: ALEX STANNARD TO CIRCULATE DRAFT OUTPUT STRATEGY FOR COMMENT

Scottish Government surveys update – paper SPSCC/09/01

5. Alex Stannard provided a summary of the Scottish Government surveys update paper.
6. Concerns were expressed over the change of definitions for the bedroom standard calculated using Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS) data. This standard is a measure of overcrowding in households based on the number of available bedrooms compared to the number of required bedrooms. The proposed new definition is based on the Housing Scotland Act 1987. There was concern that this act was actually a consolidation of previous acts and the actual definition is based on a 1935 act. The use of a 70 year old definition was questioned. There was also concern that this definition is moving away from the definition used in the 2001 Census. Ian Mate explained that the proposed definition will be the one used in the 2011 Census and that it brings it in line with European standards.
7. It was noted the effect of the change of definition results in estimates of over crowding falling by 90 per cent. It was questioned whether this change is credible. However some members felt the proposed definition could produce more accurate estimates that reflect the actual level of over crowding, despite not being consistent with previously published data. The SHCS team are planning a two month programme over the summer to look at the effect of changing the definition and will consult with stakeholders.
8. The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS) is looking at extending its contract until 2010/11. The SCJS is also looking at the business case for a youth module that would target 10 – 15 year olds. It was also noted that response rates for the SCJS were meeting targets.
9. Sonnda Catto reported no major changes for the Scottish Health Survey Knowledge, Attitudes and Motivations module but requested that this module is also allowed to provide a written update to the SPSCC in future.

ACTION: ALEX STANNARD TO ENSURE THE KNOWLEDGE ATTITUDES AND MOTIVATIONS MODULE IS GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE A WRITTEN UPDATE TO THE SPSCC IN FUTURE

10. There was concern expressed at the small number of contractors in Scotland able to conduct fieldwork for the major surveys and that there are capacity issues within the major contractors. David Hazle commented on the possibility of using smaller regional contractors but recognised much of the risk when using small contractors would lie with Scottish Government. David Hazle also noted that increasing the size of the major Scottish Government Surveys was removing major contractors from the local surveys market.
11. Nic Krzyzanowski clarified that all of ScotCen's fieldwork for the Scottish Household Survey (SHS) had moved to Ipsos-MORI when ScotCen withdrew from the SHS contract.
12. Diana Wilkinson asked for more detail on the planned ethnicity boost pilot for the Labour Force Survey (LFS). The problem with ethnicity boosts in the past has been the availability of a suitable sampling frame. The pilot boost will ask households chosen in the LFS about their neighbours to identify households to include in the boost. It was always expected that any boost would be expensive and the evaluation of the pilot will have to weigh up the benefits of more data with the cost of collecting the data.
13. Several members provided feedback for the recent SHS training days, reporting that they were excellent and very well received.
14. Shona Rennie provided a short update on the progress of producing a standard disability question. A survey has been sent around ScotStat members asking for views and the equalities team are consulting with major stakeholders.
15. Nic Krzyzanowski informed the committee of the intention to establish an SHS steering group that would take a leading role in the SHS review.

ACTION: INCLUDE SHS STEERING GROUP IN SURVEY CO-ORDINATION STURTCURE

16. Helen Fogarty informed the committee of the planned Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) review, which will be very broad and of use to other surveys.
17. Helen Fogarty provided a short update of the recent Survey Managers Network (SMN) data event. This event raised a large number of questions about Scottish Government data standards and highlighted the need for more guidance. The possibility of a new cross office group to deal with data standards was discussed but no decision was made.
18. Diana Wilkinson suggested that the survey update paper could in future include information on each surveys policy links and the use of survey data in measuring targets.

19. There was agreement that summarising the survey updates by topic rather than by survey was useful and that this approach should be adopted in future. David McPhee requested more guidance on how survey managers should provide updates.

ACTION: ALEX STANNARD TO PROVIDE MORE GUIDANCE WHEN REQUESTING SURVEY UPDATES FOR THE SPSCC

20. Ian Mate noted the SHCS team was getting increasing numbers of data requests and suggested the time needed to answer requests could be creating a bottleneck in the policy process. There was a discussion about improving dissemination processes to free up time to handle ad-hoc requests. There was a general discussion around web tabulation packages and how they could allow users to create their own analyses, freeing up time. Rob Wishart noted that attempting to build a single system is very difficult due to the diverse range and volume of SG data as well as the diverse range of user needs. David Hazle asked if a web tabulation tool could be provided, but restricted to ScotStat users. However, there was agreement that the difficulties lie in the type and amount of data available rather than restricting access. Ian Mate noted that other countries and international bodies, with similar data issues, are able to provide data through web tabulation packages and there are practical solutions that could be adopted. Some members felt this work was important and that there should be less focus on what the final solution would look like and more focus on taking the work forward.
21. Helen Fogarty commented that while we are good at providing headline data and very detailed data we may not be meeting the needs of ‘middle-users’.
22. Rob Wishart suggested two elements to consider – the gaps not covered by the major population surveys and data availability for indicators in the Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs). We need to consider what we need to measure and work collectively in a co-ordinated approach, across the surveys, to meet data requirements.
23. There was a general agreement that the Long Term Strategy for Population Surveys in Scotland 2009 – 2019 (LTS) should deal with these issues.

General Register Office for Scotland Update

24. Neil Bowie summarised Kirsty MacLean’s written update of Census 2011 for the committee. Key points were:
 - a. The Census rehearsal fieldwork is almost complete.
 - b. Almost 53,000 forms were sent out and 23,000 were returned, representing a response rate of 44%.
 - c. The downstream processing is now progressing.
 - d. The initial results should be available by the end of the year.
 - e. 11% of the response were completed online (13% in West Edinburgh and 7% in Lewis and Harris).

25. Neil Bowie explained there is a general expectation that the data from forms completed online will be of better quality and that there are some quality assurance measures built into the online form.
26. Neil Bowie confirmed there are no plans for any more preparatory fieldwork in the next 12 months.
27. Neil Bowie then provided an update on the census alternatives work. There was a large 'Beyond 2011' conference in London in May. The census alternatives team are currently supporting the Census 2011 work and are looking at data linkage options to support Census 2011. The team are also looking at alternative datasets including student databases and the school census. One element of the work is to look at child migration to feed into the migration statistics. The team are also looking at the NHS CR database to create a central population spine. Neil Bowie explained the team now have a good level of knowledge of, and experience in, data linkage and are looking at two possible data linkage packages – and IBM data management tool and Stats Canada software.

ACTION: ALEX STANNARD TO CIRCULATE KIRSTY MACLEAN'S CENSUS 2011 UPDATE PAPER

ACTION: NEIL BOWIE TO CIRCULATE PAPERS.

Long Term Strategy for Population Surveys in Scotland 2009 – 2019 (LTS) – Paper SPSCC/09/02

28. Alex Stannard provided a brief summary of the outcome of the consultation on the LTS.
29. During the consultation some respondents felt that the first strategic aim of the LTS could not be achieved if the second strategic aim was not met and that therefore the second strategic aim was not necessary. Sonnda Catto raised this point but did not request the second aim be removed.
30. There was a general discussion about the use of the word 'priority' in the first strategic aim and whether 'strategic' was more appropriate. Some members felt the word 'priority' implied immediate data needs as opposed to long term needs, while others questioned what the word 'strategic' actually meant. David McPhee suggested the word 'key' as an alternative and this was agreed by the committee.
31. Diana Wilkinson agreed to provide more detail on longitudinal research for the background note.
32. David McPhee expressed concern that the section of on the Scottish Household Survey (SHS) pre-empted the outcome of the up coming SHS review. There was agreement the section on the SHS should be softened to be clear it discusses what the SHS could become rather than what it will become.

33. There was agreement that the section on centralised data management implied a decision on moving to a central system had already been made. A centralised system may solve some of the problems the major surveys are facing but there are other options and this section should discuss the problems that need to be solved rather than how they will be solved through centralised data management. It was agreed this section should be softened to make it clear that centralised data management was an option and that a decision had not yet been made.
34. Ian Mate suggested the section should be stronger on the possibility of the Scottish Government holding survey data rather than contractors. It was agreed this is an option that should be considered during the assessment of data management but there was no agreement for the LTS to be changed to reflect a stronger line.
35. There was a discussion around the issues that need to be considered when the option of moving to centralised data management is evaluated. There is a need to reflect the balance between the benefits centralised data management will bring compared to any costs. Data security will also need to be considered, particularly the security of data in transit. There was agreement these issues must be investigated.
36. Helen Fogarty said the section should contain more on other data issues and not just centralised management (such as data standards etc.). There was agreement the word 'centralised' should be removed from the title of the section so it becomes 'data management'.
37. Alex Stannard provided more detail about the consultation responses around data management. There were two main issues, the security of data and the cost of a centralised sampling system. One respondent questioned why government should hold the data instead on contractors when they felt that contractors had a better track record on security. One respondent also suggested that centralised sampling would automatically lead to unclustered samples which may not reflect value for money. Several members questioned the validity of these concerns and that any evaluation of centralised data management should involve considering these issues. There was agreement that any assessment must consider the economic environment.
38. The consultation revealed a large amount of concern around response rates. Ian Mate suggested that the section on response rates should include evidence of response rates falling. David McPhee commented that the issue was much more complex than reflected in the strategy and that he is more concerned about differential response rates and any bias introduced due to non-response, rather than response rates simply falling. There was agreement this section should be changed to be more about the quality of data with regard to response rates rather than just tackling falling response rates. There was also agreement that the section on response rates should say there is a concern about falling response rates rather than say a decline has been seen.

39. Sonnda Catto noted the section was called 'Response Rates and Respondent Burden' but contained no details about respondent burden. Alex Stannard explained that consultation respondents did not feel respondent burden was an issue and one respondent argued a household being surveyed several times a year may not have any effect on quality or response rates. Ian Mate noted that respondent burden was not just about the number of surveys but the length of surveys. It was agreed the section should also contain a line on tackling respondent burden.
40. The possibility of boosting surveys to provide data at local authority level was discussed. Sara Grainger noted this issue will be tackled through the improving local outcome indicators project. It was also noted that this will be part of the SHS review but all survey managers should be looking into this issue. Ian Mate noted that many of the surveys have a considerable time lag between data collection and publication and that there are many other ways to meet local data needs other than boosting surveys. One method used by the Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS) is to use other data sources to assess trends to produce more up to date estimates. It was agreed that the SOAs should be discussed in the introduction to the strategy to reflect the need for sub national data.
41. Diana Wilkinson questioned how the SHS becoming core and modular would help policy data needs to be met quicker. Rob Wishart clarified that this section was about the creation of a permanent omnibus survey but members questioned how this would produce more timely information. There was agreement that the wording of the section was misleading and that the word 'quickly' should be removed.
42. Julie Goodlet-Rowley asked for clarification on what the difference between a mandatory and recommended core question is. There was some confusion on the committee about this. Alex Stannard clarified that a survey must be able to produce harmonised outputs for mandatory questions but that it was only recommended that surveys produce harmonised outputs for recommended questions. It was also agreed that the status of each questions should not be frozen and should be open to change if required by policy needs. There was also a request for the finalised core questions to be circulated.
43. The possibility of future amendments to the strategy was discussed. Alex Stannard confirmed the strategy would be a live document and Sara Grainger confirmed it would be reviewed every two years. However, there was general agreement that changes should be kept to a minimum.

ACTION: DIANA WILKINSON TO PROVIDE MORE DETAIL ON LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH FOR THE LTS BACKGROUND NOTE

ACTION: HELEN FOGARTY TO PROVIDE DETAILS ON THE DATA ISSUES DISCUSSED AT THE SURVEY MANAGERS NETWORK DATA EVENT

ACTION: ALEX STANNARD TO CIRCULATE FINALISED CORE QUESTIONS

ACTION: ALEX TO INCORPORATE AGREED CHANGES INTO THE LTS AND PUBLISH ON THE WEBSITE

Survey Co-ordination Structure – Paper SPSCC/09/03

44. Alex Stannard summarised the proposal to re-organise the survey co-ordination structure.
45. David McPhee noted it was important to get buy in from Directors, particularly if the work plan will require extra resources, and that Director membership should be considered. Alex Stannard questioned whether Directors would be able to commit to membership of the SPSCC.
46. The possibility of a single Analytical Service Division (ASD) head acting as a representative for all ASD heads was discussed. This was rejected as ASD heads may have a very diverse range of views. The option of survey managers feeding back to their ASDs was discussed. However this was also rejected as survey managers do not have ASD complete oversight.
47. It was agreed that buy in from ASDs was essential and that this happens at a working level through survey managers but the SPSCC needs to engage directly with ASD heads. Rob Wishart commented there was a variety of ways for the SPSCC to engage with ASD heads, through the ASD heads meeting and other forms of contact. Communications with ASD heads is very important and there could be a standing invitation to the SPSCC. Rob Wishart commented that communications is essential but membership may not be necessary. It was agreed that the Chief Statistician and Chief Researcher would maintain communication with ASD heads through the ASD heads meeting and that the link between ASD heads and the SPSCC should be reflect in the co-ordination structure.
48. Helen Fogarty noted it was important for survey managers and the Survey Managers Network (SMN) to have a link to the SPSCC to feed information upwards. However, it was questioned whether the SMN should have a link to the SPSCC at all. Helen Fogarty commented it was important that issues raised at the SMN could be actioned by the SPSCC and Alex Stannard noted the importance on survey managers having another route to the SPSCC other than through the Survey Harmonisation Co-ordinator.
49. Communications with other public bodies was discussed. Sara Grainger confirmed all agendas, papers and minutes would be circulated to ScotStat members and that ScotStat members would be invited to feed in through the SPSCC Secretary.
50. Sonnda Catto suggested there was a gap in not having a NHS representative on the SPSCC and that the Scottish Population Surveys Working Group (SPSWG) was at too low a level to have strategic NHS representation.

Sonnda Catto commented that the NHS would need to see a final remit of the SPSCC and SPSWG before a decision could be made on the NHS requesting membership of either body.

51. Ian Mate felt that harmonised questions and the other issues raised in the strategy are too diverse to be covered by a single working group. Ian Mate also noted that there needed to be a group containing the major survey managers that the SPSCC could have control over and guide the work of. Sara Grainger argued that the same group could look at different aspects of the strategy and questioned the value of establishing a different group with very similar membership. David McPhee suggested the SPSWG could be an overarching group that could establish sub groups to look at different issues. David McPhee also suggested the SPSWG could have a standing membership but could invite different parties and pull in different expertise to each meeting depending on the agenda.
52. Helen Fogarty noted the new structure may be too burdensome for survey managers but suggested the way forward was to try the new structure and review.
53. Sara Grainger asked whether we should wait until there is a work programme for the SPSWG before publishing the new structure. Members agreed.
54. Rob Wishart asked members to agree the new structure, subject to the changes discussed. Members agreed.
55. Rob Wishart thanked members for their membership of the committee.

ACTION: ALEX TO REFLECT LINK TO ASD HEADS IN SURVEY CO-ORDINATION STRUCTURE

ACTION: HELEN TO PROVIDE THE REMIT OF SURVEY MANAGERS NETWORK

ACTION: ALEX TO REFLECT LINKS TO SCOTTISH HOUSEHOLD SURVEY STEERING GROUP IN SURVEY CO-ORDINATION STRUCTURE

ACTION: ALEX TO FINALISE THE REMITS OF THE SPSCC AND THE SPSWG