

# **Local Government and Public Services Committee**

**LGPS(2)-08-05(p.4)**

**Date: Wednesday 21 September 2005**

**Venue: Committee Room 2, National Assembly for Wales**

**Title: Census Figures and Local Government Finance - Information from the Local Government Data Unit**

## **Purpose**

1. To provide the Committee with an insight of the implications to and uses made by local government of census of population data.

## **Summary**

2. The decennial census of population is key to local government for a number of reasons. The principal reasons are; the use of population figures in the distribution of support grants, the census reports on the whole population and it provides reliable information for small geographical areas.

3. This paper will provide examples of how the census population figures impact on local government and how local government uses the information to shape service delivery and planning.

## **Background**

4. The last census was held on 29 April 2001. When the results were first reported there were a number of concerns expressed about the completeness of the coverage. Subsequent to a number of studies into the conduct of the census, it was established that changes in society had led to under reporting in some difficult to enumerate areas.

5. The effect of under reporting had an impact on the population totals for certain areas and the grant monies they would receive. Further, it could affect their service delivery and potentially forward planning.

6. Studies established where significant difficulties had been encountered and revised figures for the mid-year population estimates were prepared, but the census figures for those areas were not reworked.

## Consideration

7. The generic value of census data to local government is the 100% coverage and reliable reporting to small geographical areas. These properties mean that census data forms the basis for analysis of needs, service delivery and planning for local government. In addition to the work within local government, the grant of finance to them for their operations is based on the population base derived from the census of population.
8. The Standard Spending Assessment (reported in the Local Government Finance Report (No.1) 2005-2006 annex 2) uses 65 items to calculate a figure. Of the 65 items 10 are directly from the most recent census (total population and age groups) and a further 20 indirectly related to census figures (Mid Year Estimates, densities, population sizes). This highlights the extent to which local government grant finance is dependent on census figures. An illustration is, when the 2001 census results were released, it was noted that the population for Cardiff was 6.8% below the 2000 mid-year estimate. It was estimated that this would reduce grant income by around £8 million per year. The mid-year population estimates, for Cardiff and other areas in Wales, were revised following the recognition of difficulties with enumeration during the collection of census returns. This revision led to an increase in the estimated total population for Wales.
9. For local authority service delivery the main cross cutting value from the census is the distribution of population and age groups by small geographical areas (as small as 400 people). This enables the identification of customer groups and boundaries for areas of need. Where there were revisions to the 2001 census figures (used in the mid-year estimates) the information for the small areas concerned was not reworked. This meant that reliable population distributions and characteristics are not available for those areas.
10. The census is a source of migration data, which shows those who moved within one year of the census. This information is difficult to obtain reliably for small areas by any other means. It is fundamental to any population projections or policy based forecasts, which form the basis of local development plans.
11. Although the census is primarily about a "head count", the associated characteristics of the population, family groups and dwellings are extremely valuable when assessing need at a local level. It may be possible to know how many one parent families are receiving benefit, but how many such family groups are there in total (not all may claim benefit) and how are they distributed geographically by housing type? This type of information is fundamental to establishing a sound data base for Community Strategies.
12. The age, characteristics and distribution of population are used to standardise other data sets, such as mortality or health incidence rates. It means more to know what proportion of the population by age and gender are unable to seek work due to poor health, to establish the relative needs of a community to others in Wales or England. The characteristics of the population like ethnicity or language ability can

be used to investigate participation rates when considering issues like social inclusion. This type of data is used for Health Social Care and Well-being needs assessment.

13. To make comparisons between different areas of Wales and England more meaningful, area classification systems have been devised. The classifications are devised from the distribution or characteristics of the enumerated population. These classifications include the rural & urban area classification and National Statistics 2001 census area classification. These aid local government when comparing service delivery performance for small geographical areas to ensure they have similar underlying characteristics.

### **Action for Subject Committee**

14. This report is for information.

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### **Examples of the use of census data, relating to various service area**

*This list is illustrative and does not try to be comprehensive or complete, but merely to illustrate some uses of census data in various service areas of local authorities.*

Economic development requires knowledge of the number of people, their distribution and potential skills and spending power. The census provides these (spending by proxy) along with information on working population by industry, home location and local inactivity. From this information analysis of available skills for attracting employers, employment needs for the resident population, retail impact assessment for planning decisions and estimates of the need to travel for work can be made.

Local authorities can influence a number of determinants of health, like physical activities, housing conditions, education needs. The census helps to identify target populations and to locate service delivery points appropriately. The census provided self reporting on "limiting long term illness" and "general health", along with the time given to the provision of care to others.

Education has an impact on health, employability and social outlook, so appropriate delivery is essential. The census enables the distribution of age groups to be identified and family structures / ethnicity to be investigated by small areas. Although the response is not reliable to questions on qualifications, the census is the only source of small area data on those of working age without qualifications.

In Wales it is possible to discover the distribution and some information on ability with the Welsh language. In the 2011 census it may be possible to identify the use of other languages.

Social services use the census to look at the distribution of the age of the population by small areas to assess the potential need for support or services. Information on family structure, economic inactivity or poor health can help to identify areas with potential needs. This can be compared to service delivery distribution to identify whether a community is self reliant or if it will contain an ageing population with future potential needs.

The movement of people for work provides valuable information about trips by mode of travel and working populations. The travel to work origin / destination matrix for small areas is unique for its national coverage combined with details of trips and characteristics of the travellers. From this information local transport services can be targeted to needy groups or to alleviate congestion. It also enables an analysis of the movement of workers by industry or occupation classification, to consider whether local needs are being met.

Environmental services use the distribution of population and household size by social type to estimate the expected production of waste material for collection. It can also be used to identify populations for schemes to recycle waste.

In housing the sharing rate is worked from family / household groups to dwellings reported. The proposed "Local Housing Assessment Guide" requires a great deal of data from the census, like population (age, gender, family arrangement, ethnicity), household migration (including origin-destination), hidden households, tenure. The census provides the only comprehensive survey by small areas which will establish the distribution of need within a local authority, without costly local surveys.