

Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

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Date: Wednesday, 1 February 2007

Venue: Senedd, Cardiff Bay

Title: Preparations for the 2011 Census of Population

Purpose

To provide the committee with an update on the latest situation with regards the 2011 Census of Population including the latest Office for National Statistics (ONS) view on content for 2011, recent research and question testing results and user views. The ONS 2011 Census Director gave a presentation on Preparations for the 2011 Census at the March 2006 Panel of Chairs Meeting. The LGPS, EPC and EOC committees discussed the 2011 Census at their 8 November, 13 December and 24 January meetings respectively.

Summary / Recommendations

This paper provides the opportunity for the Committee to discuss the latest ONS thinking on the content for the 2011 Census. Early discussion will allow the identification of potential areas of concern and influence the ONS research and question development programme over the next 8 months.

Background

Transfer of functions

In the light of the strength of feeling expressed in Wales on the matter of recording Welsh identity in the 2001 Census of Population, it was agreed that the National Assembly for Wales should have a more formal role in agreeing future census forms in Wales. A proposed transfer of functions will provide the NAW:

- a right in law to be consulted on the making of the Census Order;
- the power to make regulations for administering the Census in Wales.

This provision currently forms part of an omnibus draft Transfer of Functions Order (TFO). The draft TFO was discussed and approved by the Assembly in Plenary on October 18th and was subsequently laid in Parliament by the Wales Office Parliamentary Branch. The TFO was discussed at the Lords on November 28 and at a House of Commons Ninth Delegated Legislation Committee on December 6. Privy Council approved the TFO on December 14th, and the Order came into effect the following day.

Further information on the Census legislative process, the proposed transfer of functions and the funding agreement is given at Annex A.

Census Test

The ONS will conduct a Census Test in May 2007 in parts of five Local Authorities in England and Wales. The local authority areas - Carmarthenshire being one of them - have been chosen to be representative of a range of circumstances providing a varied cross-section of the population and types of housing that would be covered in a full census.

The primary purpose of the Census Test is twofold:

- to assess the potential impact on response rates of the inclusion of an income question, and
- to test new approaches to the operation of the Census collection (e.g. postal delivery of forms)

In addition, the Test is being used as an opportunity to assess some potential new questions in the environment of a large scale test. Consequently, some questions that are expected to be included in 2011 but have been well tested are not included in the Test. The Test questionnaire includes a Welsh tick box and an additional Welsh language question on frequency of use. The test questionnaire has been published on the ONS website:

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/pdfs/2007_test_H2_form.pdf

Welsh language

As a minimum, all households in Wales will receive both a Welsh language and an English language version of the form, as was the case in 2001. The possibility of a single form containing both languages is being investigated. For the 2007 Test in the selected enumeration districts in Carmarthenshire, households will receive both the Welsh and English language versions of the Census Test questionnaire. Information leaflets and guidance will also be available in around 10 other languages.

High Level Timetable

An overview of the ongoing timetable is at Annex B.

Mechanisms for engaging the Assembly over the next few years have recently been discussed at Cabinet. The proposals include discussing the 2011 Census at each Assembly Committee by early 2007 so that views on potential topics, as well as any areas of concern can be taken into account.

Consultation, Research and Question Testing

The ONS held a public consultation in summer 2005 in order to obtain views from interested parties on Census topic content and to identify any additional topics requested for inclusion. Further

information on this user consultation is given at Annex C.

ONS have established eight topic groups to consider each topic area. Membership includes a topic lead from ONS or other central government department, ONS methodologist, ONS Census representative, Welsh Assembly Government representative and representatives from the Scotland and Northern Ireland Census offices. The topic groups are responsible for establishing and taking into account user requirements, prioritising between topics, co-ordinating question testing and taking full account of the need for UK comparability. A summary of the ONS progress in terms of consultation and question testing is given at Annex D.

Consideration

Individual Level Questions

Development of questions for the 2007 Test has identified the potential for nearly six pages of questions for individuals were all the requirements of users to be met. Given the basis of the ONS Census funding bid is for three pages of individual questions, there is a need to identify the topics that are likely to be taken forward for 2011 so that resources for question development are targeted appropriately.

The ONS have recently begun a programme of consultation activities aimed at clarifying the priorities for the Census question content given the current working assumption for a 3 page per person form. To facilitate these discussions, ONS have prepared an option for the content of a 3 page per person Census questionnaire (Annex E), using the results of previous consultations. Content for a potential fourth page of individual questions is also covered. While this is not in current plans and central funding is extremely unlikely, there is the possibility that Government Departments could fund the extra page, but this would be subject to an assessment of the impact on response rates by ONS. It is currently estimated that a fourth page of questions would cost an additional ?20 million in questionnaire printing, delivery, collection and processing for the UK as a whole.

ONS plan to discuss the content of Annex E at workshops for England and Wales users and stakeholders in early 2007. In addition to the ONS user consultation events, officials from the Assembly's Statistical Directorate are organising workshops for key stakeholders (including equality groups, local authorities, police and health authorities, public bodies etc) in North and South Wales during February 2007.

Household Level Questions

Information on household level questions likely for inclusion in 2011 can be found in Annex F.

The consultation exercise in 2005 found support for the development of an additional quality of housing measure. The question that has been developed for inclusion in the 2007 Test aims to collect information about the state of repair of accommodation. This question requires significant further development and testing and will only be considered for inclusion in the 2011 Census if ONS are

confident that the information collected will be a priority compared to other demands, of value to users and of sufficient quality.

Other Sources

The Census of Population is not the only source of statistical information and may not necessarily be the most suitable source for collecting information on particular topics. Decisions on Census content will take into account the availability of alternative sources, the requirement for the level of detail provided by a Census (e.g. the ability to analyse small areas and small population groups) as well as the suitability of the Census as a collection mechanism. The ONS will report on these considerations as part of developing their response to the information needs expressed by users.

Financial Implications

The TFO and the proposed agreement on funding would not impose any financial implications on the Assembly. However the Assembly may have the option of requesting differences to the content and methodology of the Census in Wales, which may result in financial contribution. There is the possibility, therefore, that there will be additional financial implications. These may fall to be considered at in-year review or BPR. It is not yet possible to quantify the extent of these costs and how they would be affected by different information requests. ABPM have noted that costs have not yet been quantified, and when they are further advice will follow as appropriate on how best they should be funded. The earliest year for which additional costs may be identified is 2008-09 but this is more likely in 2009-10 or 2010-11 (BP Clearance No 1816)

Cross Cutting Themes

As the Census of Population is a cross-cutting issue, the Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services has recently written to all Subject (and Equality of Opportunity) Committee Chairs encouraging them to discuss the 2011 Census at a forthcoming meeting.

Action for Subject Committee

The committee is asked to:

- note the progress on the transfer of functions which will give the Assembly a more formal role in agreeing future Census content and conduct
- offer its view and potential concerns on the ONS proposals for the content of a 3 page per person questionnaire (Annex E).

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