


Local Counts

The future of the census

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New Local Government Network (NLGN) is an independent think tank that seeks to transform public services, revitalise local political leadership and empower local communities. NLGN is publishing this report as part of its programme of research and innovative policy projects, which we hope will be of use to policy makers and practitioners. The views expressed are however those of the authors and not necessarily those of NLGN.

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1 *Introduction*

For the past two hundred years, a ten-yearly census has counted the population. In its time it was an innovative mechanism to understand population numbers and socio-economic factors. Just as the methods have changed so has the purpose. It is no longer innovative; it is no longer a robust mechanism. There are a whole range of new challenges facing the public sector in delivering services in the 21st century – from the requirement to understand the needs and expectations of public sector customers to the macro-economic distribution of taxation and grants.

So far the debate has centred on how the traditional census can be tinkered with or reformed to provide more accurately the information it has conventionally supplied. As yet, there has been little root and branch review. What is the purpose of the census? Does it still have a place in today's society? What is the data that is required? How can it be captured?

This paper takes a more fundamental position, asking – what exactly are the types of data needed at the local level? Only then does it go on to ask how this data can be acquired.

The successful management of public services, particularly at the local level, depends on an accurate understanding of the scale and nature of the challenge. In a rapidly changing society how we choose to measure and assess the need for public services is becoming more complex but also more important. With local government in a key 'place-shaping' leadership role, it is vital that every opportunity is taken to refine and improve the available information used to gauge crucial decisions.

However, two specific challenges are converging on local policy makers – the first is the need for more sophisticated and detailed local population profiles; the second is that acquiring this information and managing it securely is becoming more complex and problematic.

Local authorities are developing their own population statistics that marginalise the role of official national statistics. There is a danger that parallel systems will evolve that are not complementary but that lead to ineffective targeting of resources, poor service outcomes for communities and increased inequalities.

What is needed is greater flexibility and discretion at the local level, and a proper exploitation of existing sources.

A fresh and radical look at the fundamental purpose and relevance of local population data is required.

In reviewing this issue, we cannot escape the conclusion that the 2011 census could be abolished and should certainly be the last one.

Instead, NLGN recommends that a new population system based on local administrative databases should be developed using existing devices.

2 Overview: What are population statistics needed for?

The key issue in considering the reform of Britain's national statistics is that their purpose must be defined before the methodology is reformed or restructured. Is there any point the census being accurate if the data it gathers is redundant or if it fails to gather essential information?

The role of population statistics

Population statistics are intended to fulfil a number of critical roles:¹

1. Resource allocation and grant settlement
 - The decennial census provides the basis for the annual population estimates that determine the distribution of £100 billion of government funding each year to local government and PCTs.² Revenue Support Grant is allocated to local authorities on the basis of their populations as calculated through the census and mid-year estimates.
2. National policy making
 - To provide the basis for establishing understanding of the rates of births, deaths, accidents, health, and crime, to inform macro-economics, and public sector response to demographics and social change, business capacity and social policy.
 - To enable central government departments to evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies.
3. Local Policy Making
 - To horizon scan and devise policy.
 - To facilitate the planning of local services (and business services) on the basis of estimated population need and demand.

1 House of Commons Treasury Select Committee, *Counting the Population*, (May 2008), p.20.

2 ONS, *The Case for the 2011 Census*.

- Local authorities, healthcare trusts and police can use local statistics to target investment and evaluate achievement.

Unsurprisingly, the first item on this list has received the most attention. More population means more funding. It therefore can quickly become a contested area and can impact on equity and fairness between geographic regions. This is where it has paid to talk. The LGA has suggested that CLG establish a contingency fund of £250 million to assist those authorities that have had to respond to migration without adequate funding.³ This is a positive response. But fair allocation of this money would of course need to be carried out on the basis of robust comparable population datasets. It is of necessity also only a part solution. Surely it would be more profitable to count the population better in the first place with an agreed measurement tool.

Even more significantly, we must ensure that local policy makers can exploit the colossal potential of accurate population data and that they have the flexibility to make use of existing data systems in a complementary approach.

³ <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pageId=103801>

3 *New challenges in acquiring population data: the challenge for traditional census*

The challenge to acquire data at the right time and in the right manner has increased as a result of:⁴

- High rate of population mobility and migration
- Illegal residency
- Changing household structures
- Increase in the number of second homes
- Growing reluctance to complete official questionnaires
- Growth of inaccessible households

Britain's population is becoming harder to count: through more emigration, immigration and internal churn; through changing lifestyles and work patterns with more diverse employment patterns, more commuting and more second homes. This makes it more difficult to define what constitutes residency.

There are clear challenges facing the current population statistics system in Britain. The Office for National Statistics' (ONS) census has faced serious criticism and scrutiny in the years since the last census of 2001. A recent report from the Treasury Select Committee has noted that the mid-year estimates are not 'fit-for-purpose'.⁵

Acknowledged problems with the traditional census

Problems with the current census process, as set out by the Statistics Commission in 2007, include:⁶

- Budgetary pressures, with the cost of the 2011 census likely to be nearly twice that of the 2001 census
- Public protests about data management and the burden that the traditional census places on citizens as a whole

⁴ Statistics Commission, *Report 36: 2011 Census – Managing the Risks* (November 2007)

⁵ *Counting the Population*

⁶ *Managing the Risks*.

- Problems with enumeration in hard to count areas, especially around migration, student populations and flats
- Poor quality address lists have undermined the enumeration policy – both the official census questionnaire and the survey.

The 2001 census population figures have been described as “infamous”, under-counting the population by some 900,000.⁷ This has had a pernicious knock-on effect onto the local government sector with underestimation of demands on services and insufficient grant settlement allocated.

Inaccurate and out-of-date information: churn

At the macro level, revisions in data-collection techniques in the last few years have seen the population projections for Britain in 2061 revised from 70 million to 80 million.⁸

A number of high profile miscalculations of local populations have come to light and thrown doubt on the accuracy of ONS statistics. Just a few of these are:

- Manchester City Council saw its mid-year population estimate for 2000 revised down by 46,700 people (one tenth of the population);⁹
- Boston Council believes that its population is 10% higher than the census estimate.¹⁰

⁷ CEBR, 'UK Population is 1.4 million more than official statistics suggest', *LGC*, 29 August 2006.

⁸ Alasdair Murray, *Does Britain need a population policy* (CentreForum, 2007)

⁹ Graham Bowley, 'The Last Census?', *Prospect Magazine*, 92 (November 2003),

¹⁰ Carly Chynoweth, 'Changing face of Britain', *The Times*, 1 July 2008.

Case study: Slough Borough Council undercount

The 'Slough case' has been taken up as a severe warning to local authorities and the data community that the basis for awarding grant settlement may be founded on highly flawed data.¹¹ Government figures informed Slough that its population was falling dramatically when in fact it was increasing significantly because of immigration. From having the ninth fastest growing population in the country, the borough was then informed it had the second fastest falling population.¹² The incoherence of the statistics was laid bare when child benefit data revealed that there were more children receiving child benefits in Slough than the ONS currently say live in Slough.

Previous NLGN research has expressed concern about the census methodologies, concluding that the '2001 Census no longer accurately reflects local populations'.¹³ This study and others highlight:

- significant numbers of second homes and inaccessible properties;
- complex residential structure and substantial residential redevelopment;
- large numbers of internal migrants.

In particular, migrant and student populations have been found to be poorly enumerated. This has led to the ONS's handling of migrant figures being described by one leading council official as 'shambolic'.¹⁴

Population movement or churn presents challenges for policy makers and renders population figures more difficult to estimate. As NLGN and local authorities have pointed out, the issue is not principally one of immigration. On this particular point, the methodology for capturing immigration and emigration has been criticised fiercely by the House of Commons Treasury Select Committee for their over-reliance on a small-sample International Passenger Survey.¹⁵ The current systems are inadequate to measure cross-border movements.

¹¹ 'Slough Borough Council claims census mistake' *LGC*, 17 May 2006

¹² Slough Borough Council, *There's no accounting for some people: measuring migration for grant distribution* (July 2006)

¹³ Matthew Clifton, *Managing Migration: a local approach to a global phenomenon* (NLGN, 2007)

¹⁴ Jamie Hailstone, "'Shambolic' ONS shamed", *MJ*, 29 May 2008.

¹⁵ House of Commons Treasury Select Committee, *Counting the Population*, (May 2008), p.15.

Case study: City of Westminster Council

Following an address matching exercise, the ONS accepted that it had under-enumerated Westminster's population in the 2001 census and subsequently revised its the MYE 2001 by adding a further 17,500 people into the population. Subsequently, the ONS revoked the 'unattributable change' elements to its MYE methodology for revised inter-census estimates and Westminster's population was estimated to grow substantially for the next 5 years. However a subsequent change of MYE methodology in 2007 (caused by a change of calculation to the attribution of international migrants within the UK) meant that the City of Westminster had, in effect, lost a significant amount of its population increase since 2001. Factors behind the original census underestimates include poor address lists available to enumerators, enumerator training problems, poor response rates, inaccessible households, and complex living arrangements. Achieving accurate mid-year estimates is also made particularly difficult because of the high levels of short-term migrants, a small percentage of owner-occupiers, significant number of students, the prevalence of part-time dwellers and the large number of 'hidden households' within the City.

However, as the ONS has recognised, 'National level population estimates are not too bad, the challenge is at the local level'.¹⁶ Therefore the more pernicious problem has been the failure to quantify internal migration or 'churn' within Britain. As the Director of Finance at Slough Borough Council has noted, it does not matter to local authorities 'whether someone has come from Poland or [moved] from Putney to Slough' if the statistics were not able to track them.¹⁷ In turn, it must be noted that internal migrant populations are often those most in need of local services.¹⁸

The ONS, the LGA and the Government have been working to rectify this problem – through the Inter-Departmental Task Force in 2006, *Improvement Migration and Population Statistics* programme and research commissioned

¹⁶ Radio 4, Today Programme, 23 May 2008

¹⁷ *Counting the Population*, p.15.

¹⁸ CLG, *Moving on: reconnecting frequent movers* (2006), p.9.

from the Institute of Community Cohesion.¹⁹ ONS research has identified sources (such as the Higher Education Statistics Authority) that can help to inform the estimation of these hard-to-count groups.²⁰ A cross-Government programme to improve migration and population statistics has been set up along side a senior programme board steering group.

Timely figures

No matter how accurate the data is, under the current system, estimates are often out-of-date and revenue support grant is distributed from central government to local authorities using mid-year estimates derived from data several years old.²¹ In fact, as the LGA has argued, 'by definition, the census becomes out-of-date as soon as it is published'.²² This brings problems for local authorities. As Paul Carter, Leader of Kent County Council has noted,

'We are struggling to deliver our services within the grant that is given to us by national government and if the grant is based on out of date population numbers we will always struggle to play catch up'²³

Experts have pointed out that increased rates of social change and the need for more up-to-date data have made infrequently-updated census data insufficient for many applications.²⁴

Public Trust

All public information systems carry risks associated with trust. It is perhaps worth bearing in mind that the first census was attacked as being a 'most effectual engine of rapacity and repression'.²⁵ It is a question therefore of how this risk is managed. Nonetheless, a European Commission survey of spring 2007 into public trust in official statistics listed Britain 27th out of

¹⁹ Statistics Commission, *A Candid Friend: reflections of the Statistics Commission 2000-2008* (Mar 2008); ICOCO & LGA, *estimating the scale and impacts of migration at the local level* (Nov 2007)

²⁰ ONS, *Improving Migration and Population Statistics, 2007 Local Authority Case Studies: Final Report* (February 2008), p.15.

²¹ *Counting the Population*, Ev 149

²² T.D. Allen, *LGA Response to the Treasury Select Committee Inquiry into Counting the Population* (Nov 2007)

²³ Radio 4, Today Programme, 23 May 2008.

²⁴ David Martin, 'Last of the censuses? The future of small area population data', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Volume 31, Number 1, March 2006, pp.9.

²⁵ Philip Johnston, 'The Census just doesn't add up', *Daily Telegraph*, 10 March 2006.

the 27 EU member states.²⁶ Recent figures suggest that only a minority of the population trust official statistics.²⁷ A survey of local authority Chief Executives revealed that an even smaller proportion were confident that the Government had responded appropriately to statistical problems.²⁸

Privacy has become contested ground. Recurrent accusations of a 'surveillance society' have been hard to dispel as technology provides more opportunities for the tracking of people and their lives. Recent events, including the mislaying of sensitive data on disks and laptops, have heightened concern about the vulnerability of state-managed information. This is exacerbated by continued fear of identity fraud.

The new Statistics Authority (SA), which subsumes the ONS for all purposes apart from civil registration and is now responsible to the Cabinet Office, has the potential to open a new dialogue with the population and set out clearly what data is required, why and for what purpose.

Cost

The 2011 census is set to cost approximately £500 million.²⁹ Simply an extra fourth page of questions proposed for the upcoming census (the census is currently set at three pages) would cost £25 million. It might be questioned whether this is the best use of public money.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that the work invested by the ONS and other agencies are making the 2011 census methodology more robust in counting some of those missed in 2001. There is real doubt however that mere reform of the traditional census can provide answers to the wide range of demands made by statistical users in the twenty-first century.

²⁶ European Commission, *Europeans' Knowledge of Economics Indicators* (April 2007), p.38.

²⁷ 'Public confidence in official statistics still low', National Statistics Press Release, 17 March 2008

²⁸ LGC.

²⁹ Ev.302.

4 *Investigating the type of response needed*

Reform or revolution?

The clamour for a change to the traditional census is growing. The Statistics Commission argued in 2007 that an early start must be made to ensure that the 2011 census is the last of its kind. It recommended that consideration should be given to collecting some of the census data through a continuous survey and that the 2011 Census should be used as an experimental opportunity to compare existing administrative data sources in parallel with the census.³⁰

In May 2008, the Treasury Select Committee recommended that the 2011 census should be the last of its kind. The Committee concluded that the 'traditional census has almost had its day' and recommended that the 'new Statistics Authority establish as an immediate priority the provision of local population statistics that more accurately reflect the full range of information available about local populations and the effects of internal migration'. It went on to recommend that it establish a pilot project enabling a population register to be operated alongside the 2011 Census in order to compare the effectiveness of such a system with that of the Census.³¹

Reluctance to reform

There have been indications from the ONS that after 2013, there may be efforts to work towards a revised methodology: possibly to include larger surveys, a shorter census and increased use of administrative sources.³²

The ONS has responded proactively to many of the criticisms since the 2001 census, and done much detailed work around consulting with users. However, the implication appears to be that, still three years away from the census, the agencies are too far down the line to amend the approach radically for 2011 and that the 2011 census may not necessarily be the last.³³ In the background, government departments – including the Treasury and CLG

³⁰ SC, *Managing the Risks*

³¹ *Counting the Population*, pp. 3-4, 44, 49.

³² Pete Benton, *Future of the Census* (Presentation 2004); ONS, *Proposals For An integrated Population Statistics System* (2003); ONS, *A Review of the Potential Use of Administrative Sources in the Estimation of Population Statistics* (November 2007); UKSA, Response to *Counting the Population*, 21 July 2008

³³ UKSA, Response to *Counting the Population*, 21 July 2008

– have been accused of taking a back seat and leaving the onus on the ONS and SA.³⁴ Despite the pivotal place that central government has in deciding the shape of the data requirements, the Treasury admitted recently that central government had not started thinking about an alternative census for 2021.³⁵ The department also expressed reservations about the existence of other sources to substitute for the traditional census.³⁶

The ONS has argued that:

‘There is an ongoing need for high quality census information, and that it can only be provided by a traditional census in 2011. No alternative source would provide the quality of data required... If a national identity register were to be developed this might form the basis for a future Integrated Population Statistics System, which could remove the need for a census at some point. Experience from Scandinavian countries is that full implementation of such a system can take up to 30 years, as there are significant data quality, administrative and technical issues.’³⁷

This is a concerning admission. As will be seen in the next chapter, its pessimism is not born out by experiments underway currently at the local authority level.

Because £100 billion of funding is allocated per year on the basis of the decennial census, the ONS has argued that the business case ‘clearly demonstrates the unique value of the census and that the benefits of having the information far outweigh the costs of its collection’.³⁸ But this is an argument for funding an effective statistics regime rather than an endorsement of the existing methodological approach *per se*.

Options for reform

International comparisons demonstrate that there are a range of four broad methods of population data acquisition. As Professor David Martin has set out, the majority of countries are moving at least to a hybrid data collection system:³⁹

³⁴ Westminster City Council, *Population Summit Report* (April 2007)

³⁵ *Counting the Population*, Ev 108.

³⁶ *Counting the Population*, Ev 122.

³⁷ ONS, *The Case for the 2011 Census*, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census/2011census/2011project/2011case.asp>

³⁸ ONS, *The Case for the 2011 Census*, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census/2011census/2011project/2011case.asp>

³⁹ David Martin, ‘Last of the censuses? The future of small area population data’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Volume 31, Number 1, March 2006, pp.9-10.

Figure 1 International comparison of population data collection strategies following the 2000 round of censuses

Strategy	Example	Trajectory	Geo-referencing systems
Conventional census	UK, South Africa, Australia, Ireland	Further development of census; aspiration towards other strategies	Wide range in resolution of available population georeferences; range of output area sizes
Short form census and community survey	USA	2000 last long form census; 2010 short form only plus continuous survey	Investment in MAF/TIGER; outputs to block aggregations and communities
Rolling census	France	1999 last full enumeration; move now to annual sample census	Sampling of addresses and communes; output for communes
Census-type information from administrative sources	Netherlands, Finland, Denmark	Administrative 'census'; annual statistics from administrative sources	Integrated population and address registers; aggregated to small areas of grid squares required

Which of these four strategies should Britain adopt?

Previous research on international experiences has uncovered substantial benefits in using administrative sources. Learning from the Nordic experience, some of the benefits of an administrative data base system include:⁴⁰

- Continuously updated information

⁴⁰ SA, *The Nordic Contrast* (2007)

- Reliable
- Inexpensive
- Accurate
- Reduction of response burden

The LGA has argued that administrative data can supplement traditional censuses – by offering a ‘quality check’ or ‘reality check’ of the figures in between censuses and as part of the estimation process.⁴¹ The question is really what are the real demands on the data and how could these be fulfilled.

⁴¹ *Counting the Population*, Ev 170 (Sir Simon Milton); T.D. Allen, *LGA Response to the Treasury Select Committee Inquiry into Counting the Population* (November 2007)

5 Exploring local demands on data

The Government has set councils a number of major goals, which make new demands on local population data. These new ambitions, as set out in the 2006 Local Government White Paper, offer great potential for the remodelling of services but only when customer information is harnessed. Local authorities have been encouraged to:

- to deliver outcomes to their residents;
- to help shape the local place;
- to meet rising citizen expectations.⁴²

Evidence-based policy making

The Local Government White Paper emphasised the importance of accurate, accessible and up-to-date information on service performance in order to encourage citizen participation. It went on,

“sophisticated local information systems ... can be a powerful tool for targeting activity and improving decision-making. In particular, “real time” information on performance can allow service providers to take swift action to correct problems and improve delivery. It also allows local people to make informed decisions about the quality of services and the performance of service providers.”⁴³

Evidence-based policy-making is pivotal to the delivery of strategic services and local priorities. Local authorities have expressed their need for information on a whole range of aspects of their population: ethnic group, religion, nationality and language information from the 2011 Census.⁴⁴ Such data enables councils to map social exclusion and community cohesion, set credible baselines to monitor the impact of regeneration projects and respond to the equalities agenda.⁴⁵

⁴² ODPM, *Local Government White Paper*

⁴³ CLG, *Strong and prosperous communities: The Local Government White Paper*, Volume 1, Paras 6.27, 6.28 (October 2006)

⁴⁴ ONS, *2011 Census: Ethnic group, national identity, religion and language consultation: Local and regional government responses to the 2011 Census stakeholders consultation 2006/07* (Oct 2007), p.3.

⁴⁵ Shirley Dex and Kingsley Purdam, *Equal opportunities and recruitment: How Census data can help employers to assess their practices* (JRF, 2005)

The development of e-government initiatives has transformed the potential for councils to understanding the profiles and needs for their local communities. Smart cards and entitlement cards enable councils to establish more efficient transactional arrangements and also to see how and where services are used. For instance the use of Oyster cards in London heralds the potential for transport operators to understand their market as meta-data is stored and analysed. In turn, local authorities can work-out which routes are popular when and give an insight into customer preferences. More accurate and pertinent data has the potential to drive significant policy changes in response to community needs. For instance, in Warwickshire, data analysis exposed pockets of severe deprivation in what is otherwise an affluent shire county. This facilitated remedial regeneration investment to be targeted.⁴⁶ But this approach needs to be taken a stage further. Local administrative databases offer the potential to cultivate more refined evidence on individuals and households.

Case study: London Borough of Hackney:

Accessibility to nursery places ⁴⁷

By using administrative databases, Hackney has encountered fewer numerical/statistical discrepancies than when using official statistics. The council has also been able to profile the local demographics more sensitively down to the household level. This information can be used to fulfil a whole host of new service strategies. For instance, to plot demand and existing provision of nursery care by combining a full range of sources such as library, health and children's services data. Analysis has been carried out of geographical access to nurseries among households with children under 5. Using 250m and 500m as cut off criteria, the percentage of those within a particular geographic catchment without access can be plotted and measures taken to stimulate the local child care market. By assimilating this information with other socio-economic data, it can be understood how well served are those on benefits, those in social housing and those who live outside these catchments. In due course, this information can be used for measuring and profiling school catchments, the library and other public services.

⁴⁶ CLG, *Local Information Systems: A review of their role, characteristics and benefits* (2007), p.6.

⁴⁷ LBH and Mayhew Associates, *Estimating and Profiling the population of Hackney* (Mar 2008)

Joined-up service delivery

The recent Local Government Act has placed on local government and its partners a 'duty to cooperate'. An increasing range of services have data collection and sharing at their heart. Effective sharing of information is critical to the agenda of safe children through DfES's *Every Child Matters*; it can help target crime and homelessness.⁴⁸ Through data sharing across and between organisations more cohesive and integrated communities can be promoted.⁴⁹

The Local Government White Paper also emphasised that effective data-sharing within LSPs should underpin Local Area Agreement strategic targets.⁵⁰ With the move to Multi-Area Agreements this must be progressed across the sub-region.

⁴⁸ <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/deliveringservices/informationsharing/>. HM Government, *Information sharing vision statement* (Sept 2006).

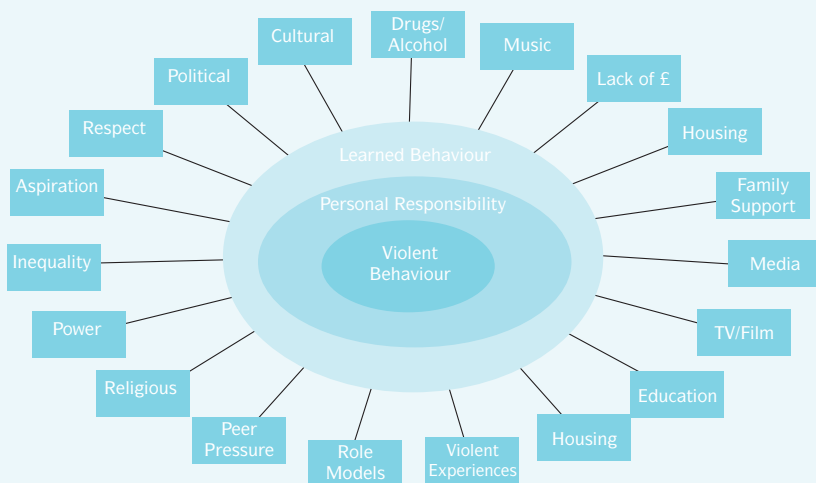
⁴⁹ CLG, *Guidance for local authorities on community cohesion contingency planning and tension monitoring* (May 2008), p.5.

⁵⁰ CLG, *Strong and prosperous communities: The Local Government White Paper*, Volume 1, (October 2006), 4.74, 5.30,

Case study: Tackling gangs through multi-agency working

A recent NLGN paper has emphasised the importance of integrated multi-agency partnership working at the local level to tackle gangs.⁵¹ It concluded that it is imperative that local gang strategies can target not only the neighbourhoods most at risk, but also target young at-risk people at the right time.

The Southwark example indicates just how many stakeholders are involved and how information is critical to cross-working and to ensuring that the different stakeholders can each play their part at the right time.



As can be seen, the allocation of resources to particular neighbourhoods across the whole spectrum of services requires sophisticated information about population and interventions. By integrating data from a wide set of agencies, including crime statistics, education, social services, housing, Youth Offending Teams and Third Sector interventions, it is possible to take the early coordinated action necessary. The new initiative ContactPoint offers the potential to share information on interventions and subsequently to be incorporated with demographic data.

⁵¹ Anthony Brand and Richard Ollerearnshaw, *Gangs at the Grassroots: Community solutions to street violence* (NLGN, July 2008).

Managed well, intelligence and data sharing can break down silos within organisations and can harmonise cross-institutional goals and expectations. Data sharing should be a positive means to align organisational goals between public sector organisations and at the sub-regional level.

For this to work, local authorities and other agencies must be trading in a 'common currency' of information that is relevant to its purposes.

Kent County Council's ambitious partnership approach to worklessness is a case in point. It requires complex and timely data sharing between partners including schools, colleges, Connexions, employers, the LEA and central government. In order for real-time data to be shared and the population's needs mapped, agencies must share the right information at the right time.⁵²

Underlying this is the complex problem of how to ensure a safe environment for the sharing and exchange of data. At the moment, strict rules stipulating the context within which data can be shared can impinge on the maximum exploitation of this information.

Personalisation, Localisation and Targeting

CLG has emphasised the potential role for local information systems in three key areas:⁵³

- Empowerment and devolution
- Preventative work and early intervention
- Strengthening bottom up accountability

There is a growing need to personalise services, to understand the needs of individuals, of households and of communities so that integrated services can be tailored around their needs.⁵⁴

The rise of the preventative agenda in health has increased the importance of such personalised information. Accurate actual and predictive data about populations are central to underpinning responses to obesity, to diabetes

⁵² NLGN, *The Local Journey to Work* (NLGN, 2008)

⁵³ CLG, *Local Information Systems: A review of their role, characteristics and benefits* (2007), p.7.

⁵⁴ C Leadbeater, *Personalisation through participation: A new script for public services* (Demos 2004).

and to other health services and crucial to timely and appropriate at the neighbourhood level. Long-term service models and redesigns rely on accurate scenario planning and understandings of future demands for health and social care services.

Case study: Health and local communities⁵⁴

Reducing the 16+ smoking rate (National Indicator 123) is the ninth most popular target for Local Area Agreements, selected by 87 local authorities. Key to successfully tackling the problem is an understanding of patients, their needs and the success of existing programmes. As smoking is a symptom of deprivation, it is also crucial to have a detailed profile of the population.

When campaigns aim to communicate with specific geographic and demographic sections of the population, it is essential that these audiences are identified correctly and their behaviours and attitudes understood.

By connecting with residents through market research, providers can understand where knowledge of local services is patchy and how to connect with the age-groups that they were targeting.

Understanding and involving citizens in strategic service planning is becoming integral to the function of a council. When councils commission services they must involve citizens.⁵⁶ Co-production and preventative care is putting an onus on local government identifying with their customers. Knowing where to invest in regeneration is almost as important as having the funding to invest. This applies to individuals as well as neighbourhoods.

⁵⁵ Dr Foster Intelligence, *Treating Inequalities: how local innovators are fighting the health and social care disease* (June 2008).

⁵⁶ CLG, *Creating Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities: Statutory Guidance: draft for consultation* (2008).

Case study: Neighbourhood Knowledge Management: Cascading sub-sets

The Healthy Living Partnership commissioned the NKM exercise to link local data to help profile populations and neighbourhoods. Some of its results so far are interesting. Vulnerable groups can be targeted by creating cascading sub-sets that drill down into segmentations of the population. Density maps can be drawn identifying those over certain ages with different backgrounds, residencies and income status. Investment can then be targeted at these individuals.⁵⁷

For instance: Woman, single woman, single mother, single mother with three children, single mother with three children living in social housing, single mother with three children living in social housing in x area.

Once this is done, likelihood/risk can be assessed. Correlation to other variables can be calculated, such as receipt of benefits, receipt of services, ethnicity and geographic patterning. This can inform policy making and resource allocation.

This methodology can be applied to almost any policy area. For instance, the link between school exclusion and low GCSE attainment is well known. The risk/likelihood of school exclusion can be plotted against whether the pupil lives in social housing, ethnicity, benefits status, single-parent status and whether they are known to the Youth Offending Team. It can then be understood which factors are the most influential. For instance, in one example it was found that a White pupil in a single adult household who is a youth offender is five times more likely to be excluded than a Black or Ethnic Minority pupil who is living in social housing and eligible for school meals.

The new Comprehensive Area Assessment holds out the prospect of a more intimate insight into and profiling of citizen needs and expectations.⁵⁸ The move away from central government performance targets opens up the prospect for citizen panels, surveys and sophisticated customer intelligence to inform policy making.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Professor Les Mayhew, *Alternatives to the Official Statistics: Neighbourhood Knowledge Management* (presentation); Professor Les Mayhew, *Neighbourhood Knowledge Management Pilot Project: making neighbourhood knowledge accessible*.

⁵⁸ London Councils Policy Network, *The 'Fit for Purpose' Policy Function to support a Place-shaping London Borough* (Dec 2007)

⁵⁹ Westminster model.

In parallel, citizens no-longer expect to receive an off-the-shelf service but something tailored around their needs. The personalisation agenda is taking root in health and social care and is set to spread to other local services. These must become more responsive to personal needs and expectations. As a recent Cabinet Office report has stated, 'Public services should reflect the preferences and needs of those who use them, not those who provide them'.⁶⁰ Knowledge of where customers are, what they are likely to expect and want is imperative to the strategic planning and commissioning of services.

Communicating with residents

Greater knowledge of customers and their needs, and better utilisation of data can lead to better communication. The burden can be reduced on the customer and efficiencies gained by government. Many local authorities have moved to a call centre approach. The next generation of solutions lie in dovetailing frontline services and interactive information systems. The Home Office has announced that its proposed local crime maps will be ready by the end of 2008 and will provide up-to-date knowledge about crimes in their local neighbourhoods and streets. This will mean that residents can see the real level of crime and help the police address it.⁶¹

Case study: Department for Work and Pensions: 'Tell us once' campaign

The DWP is leading on a cross-government initiative to ensure that customers only need to contact one department about a change in personal details or situation. This information will then be shared between the relevant agencies. The result will be fewer contacts for customers and efficiencies for government. This initiative is currently being trialled through different mediums of communication across a range of departments and local authorities.

Performance Management

Greater data knowledge can drive service improvement and new service models. Data is integral to performance management. By incorporating outcome data, performance management systems can ensure that policies are

⁶⁰ Cabinet Office, *Excellence and Fairness: achieving world class public services* (June 2008), p.13.

⁶¹ 'Crime Maps online "by end 2008"', *The Times*, 4 August 2008.

responsive and effective. Some councils are already incorporating customer intelligence into their systems – such as Kettering Borough Council, which has introduced monthly ‘performance clinics’ where the management team discuss customer performance indicators alongside other performance indicators.⁶²

Case study: Measuring effectiveness through proxy measures

Data from administrative geo-referenced sources can be matched against data from service use to understand comparative take-up of specific programmes and projects by different catchments of the population and different communities. From this can be extrapolated reasoning about the impact of transport, demographics and public choices.

Subsequently, by manipulating integrated tabulated information, realistic proxy measures can be developed by creating causal relationships between population data and service usage. This can be incorporated with targeted surveys to provide snapshots of policy effectiveness.

If agglomerated in the right way, data can be used to compare performance across partnership areas. The Norfolk Data Observatory, for instance, comprises a whole range of partners from Partners include, County Council, Districts, Police, Health, Norfolk Connexions, Learning Skills Council, Shaping the Future, Voluntary Sector.⁶³ If potential data sources are opened up and exploited to their full, the benefits to partner organisations can rise exponentially.

Such methods can also allow councils to track and chart success of regeneration investment and their impact on local crime, the economy, educational attainment, deprivation and benefits dependency. The London Borough of Harrow has sought to work with official statistics and local data to analyse the extent to which social problems have been resolved or merely displaced. In turn, this can help shape strategic policy-making for future investment in regeneration and can be used as a ‘predictive tool’.⁶⁴

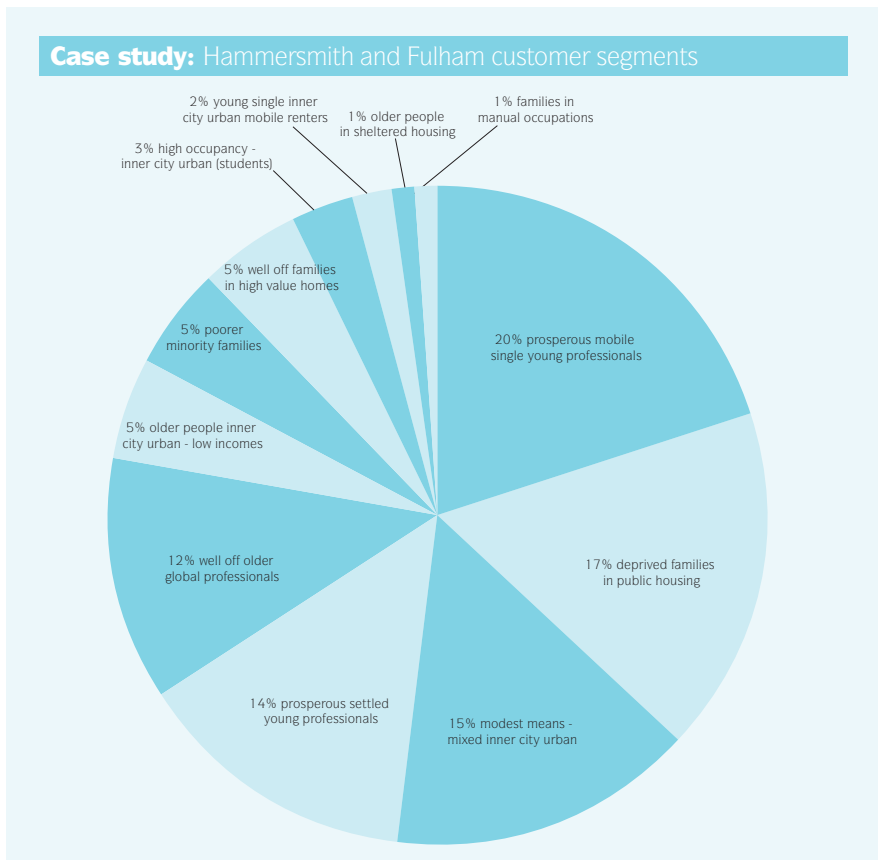
⁶² *Putting the Customer First*, p.24.

⁶³ Wendy Pontin, *Can Local Intelligence Systems help underpin partnerships and performance with place-based business intelligence? – Norfolk’s experience* (April 2008)

⁶⁴ Sue Kaminska, *Harrow Vitality Profiles: combining local and national information* (Presentation, May 2007)

Customer Intelligence

Better population data is essential for more effective and efficient service delivery such as with the provision of timely and appropriate preventative services.⁶⁵ The LGA has initiated a partnership with the National Consumer Council to develop and promote best practice in customer intelligence.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, the IDeA has set up the Local Government Delivery Council to help ensure that organisations work closely with their communities and ‘understand their needs, preferences and aspirations and [engage] local people’.⁶⁷ Customer Insight is knowledge derived from the variety of qualitative and quantitative data and information that local authorities collect about their area.



⁶⁵ LGA, *Putting the Customer First: Lessons from Business*, (March 2006), p29.

⁶⁶ <http://www.lga.gov.uk/Documents/Agenda/Improvement%20Board/230506/Item%201.pdf>

⁶⁷ IDeA, *A Vision for the Local Government Delivery Council* (February 2008), p.1.

The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham were one of the first local authorities to harness the potential of customer data. The LBHF Customer Segmentation was an adaption of MOSIAC Public Sector from Experian. A Single Client Index was developed which integrated customer data from a number of different transactional systems and has developed a sophisticated customer segmentation model. This allowed the council to trace and granulate the population on the basis of gender, career, household income, location and type of residence.⁶⁸

Segmentation provides a systematic and consistent view of the population. It also provides a 'common currency' that can be shared across the council and potentially between partners. It has allowed the council to understand the demographic and socio-economic profile of its population and to link this with customer behaviours. Through its Customer First Access Strategy, assumptions can be extracted about the behaviour and expectations of different groups of the population – based for instance on age, geography and lifestyle. Client Index Data, developed from actual service usage and consolidated across all service areas, can be integrated.⁶⁹

Demographic changes

Demographic changes are raising the stakes for a sector tight on resources. An ageing population is putting renewed pressure on adult care services. At the same time, it is becoming more necessary than ever that local authorities can scan the horizon, predict future demand and shape long-term strategic services such as preventative care around their communities.

Gross expenditure by local authorities on adult social care rose to £14.2 billion in 2005-06.⁷⁰ In 1948, just 10.5% of the population was aged 65 or older. By 2001, the proportion had risen to 15.7%. It is projected that by 2051 the figure will be 24.2% - almost one in four of us. This pace of change must be understood fully to project future demand, supply and likely expenditure. Just

⁶⁸ IDeA, *developing customer insight* (May 2008), p.1

⁶⁹ LBH&F, *Customer Segmentation*.

⁷⁰ CSCI, *The State of social care in England 2006-07: Executive Summary* (January 2008), p.6.

as central government is modernising its patient data systems through its NHS Connecting for Health and putting renewed emphasis on horizon-scanning, local authorities must be able to capture similar levels of customer statistics.

Local Flexibility

Under the traditional census, ONS population data has been available in Output Areas which are correlated to fixed areas, traditionally ward boundaries and clusters of postcodes. As wards vary in size significantly, a new geographical hierarchy was introduced called Super Output Areas to improve reporting of small area statistics more consistently, which are used for the Indices of Deprivation. However, these have minimum populations of 1,000.⁷¹ The ONS's Neighbourhood Statistics Service is based on these outputs.

However, “double devolution” from the central state to local government and then down to the neighbourhood level brings further challenges. As local authorities and neighbourhoods define their place, rather than have it superimposed, there will be a growing discrepancy between top-down delineations of boundaries used for the collection of statistical information and those that residents themselves apply. These are likely to be based round schools, family and social networks, amenities and physical boundaries such as roads.⁷² CLG research found that many policy makers at the local level ‘were disappointed by the amount or range of local detail available and the rigidity of the local geographies used to present information.’⁷³ Despite the need for more localised and individualised data, ONS took a stricter policy on disclosure than previously, which resulted in the loss of some geographical detail.⁷⁴

One local authority study has criticised the statistical system not only because of the flawed and unfair distribution of government grant but because, ‘the lack of geographical granularity and rigidity in the reporting of official statistics is a further cause for concern especially in terms of being able to allocate resources and plan and deliver local services effectively and efficiently at the local level’.⁷⁵

⁷¹ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/soa.asp>; http://www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/census_geog.asp#oa

⁷² M. Taylor & M. Wilson, *The importance of the neighbourhood: Tackling the implementation gap* (JRF, 2006)

⁷³ CLG, *Local Information Systems: A review of their role, characteristics and benefits* (2007), p.23.

⁷⁴ Ludi Simpson, ‘Are the census outputs fit for purpose?’, (RSS, November 2003), p.4.

⁷⁵ *Estimating and profiling the population.*

The potential for geo-referencing techniques have been under-exploited. Using x and y coordinates, the population can be plotted to household level and coordinates allocated to individuals.

For all these reasons, councils must be able to define the communities of population to which they wish to provide services and be able to drill down to understand needs on the widest sets of variables.

The Case for a Localised System

The picture set out above indicates that local policy makers are demanding more up-to-date, accurate, granulated and in-depth maps of their populations in order to define policy, monitor its effectiveness, target vulnerable catchments and allocate resources.

It is also clear that councils are taking an increasing role in developing this information – whether it be through customer profiling, sharing of data or mapping their populations through the use of administrative databases.

Finally, it is clear that across the public sector there is a wide-ranging pool of existing data which can be harnessed.

Together these offer a route to bypass the traditional census.

When harnessed, this information can help government impact positively on a whole range of services – from local worklessness, to regeneration, to the allocation of nursery places, to understanding the future demands of adult social care, to effective anti-gang strategies, to understanding the factors that underpin exclusion or underperformance at school.

Local authorities have not only a specific and unique demand for sophisticated population data but also extraordinary potential to open up existing data pools. Crucially, any new methodology must liberate local policy makers to define which data sources they wish to tap into.

Data needs are still too driven by central stipulation rather than by local needs. In terms of user consultation on what statistics are needed, some have felt that the Census content is particularly still driven by central government departments rather than the public good more generally.⁷⁶ As CentreForum

⁷⁶ *Counting the Population*, Ev 45.

has concluded, the problem is partly one of ‘of an overly centralised state’ and the ‘slow and inflexible system of resource allocation’.⁷⁷ But the problem is more than allocation – it is one of understanding demand. Not only is the resource centralised but so are information systems.

This top-down approach is manifested well through one of the more severe failures of the traditional census: in the City of Westminster. The conditions in Westminster have been classified by a consultant’s report as ‘extreme’. Concern was raised at the ONS’s statement that although its methods might not be suitable for all cities, or extreme cities, ‘our methods might be sufficiently good enough for more typical cities’. This indicates towards a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach.⁷⁸

Conversely, one positive outcome of the difficulties encountered by the 2001 census and subsequent MYEs is that it has spurred on local authorities to develop their own population data systems that go beyond the scope of national statistics. However, the subsequent danger is that the national and local systems operate in parallel and remain disconnected, and that this leads to further disagreements, misalignment of resources, duplication, inefficiencies and poor service outcomes.

The context set out above suggests that statistics must be made more local. This does not mean that there should be no national systems or parameters for gathering certain pieces of population data. But, these must be flexible enough to be manipulated in different ways at the local level and for local authorities to derive segmentation.

⁷⁷ CentreForum.

⁷⁸ Local Government Futures, *An Assessment of Population Data for City of Westminster* (July 2007), p.28.

6 *Making the most of existing sources: administrative data*

The range of administrative sources

As seen in Figure 1 below, there are a wide range of administrative sources that can provide population and profiling intelligence. Many of these are in the ownership of local authorities. The ONS itself has acknowledged that administrative data sources offer a 'rich source of data on international migrants'.⁷⁹

While it must be noted that the majority of administrative databases do not contain information on the whole population,⁸⁰ the key point is that administrative data must be linked intelligently and checked and cleaned against other data to ensure accuracy. By checking initial databases against other existing sources, duplications, omissions and errors can be identified and rectified.

⁷⁹ ONS, *A Review of the Potential Use of Administrative Sources in the Estimation of Population Statistics* (November 2007), p.2.

⁸⁰ Hackney, p.10.

Figure 2: Administrative and other sources for population and profiling intelligence⁸¹

Data Set	Source of Data
Electoral registers	Local authority
Pupils Level Annual School Census	Local authority
Data on new arrivals in Schools (social inclusion and development team)	Local authority
Housing Needs survey	Local authority
Data on housing requirements of international migrants and asylum seekers	Local authority
Council tax	Local authority
Registered Social Landlords Data	Local authority
Social Services	Local authority
Council house tenant data	Local authority
Economy: business rates	Local authority
Children: free school meals	Local authority
Targeted local surveys	Local Authority
Citizen Panels / focus groups	Local authority
Anti-social behaviour statistics and Youth Offending Teams	Local authority
Housing: empty homes	Local Authority
Environmental: pest, noise, complaints, health and safety incidents	Local Authority
Benefits data covering various population groups;	DWP
Data covering the school age population and qualifications data;	DCSF
National Insurance data covering the working population, self-assessment and PAYE tax returns;	Inland Revenue
Workers Registration Scheme	Home Office
National Program for Information Technology (NPfIT) – detailed information on health conditions and treatments.	NHS
GP Patient registers	NHS
Work and Pensions longitudinal study	DWP
NHS walk-in centres	NHS
Employment	Connexions
National Property Gazetteer	IDeA
Geographic information	Ordnance Survey
Vehicle ownership and addresses	DVLA
Student data	Higher Education Statistics Agency
Criminal activity	Home Office, Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, Police

Implications of using administrative sources

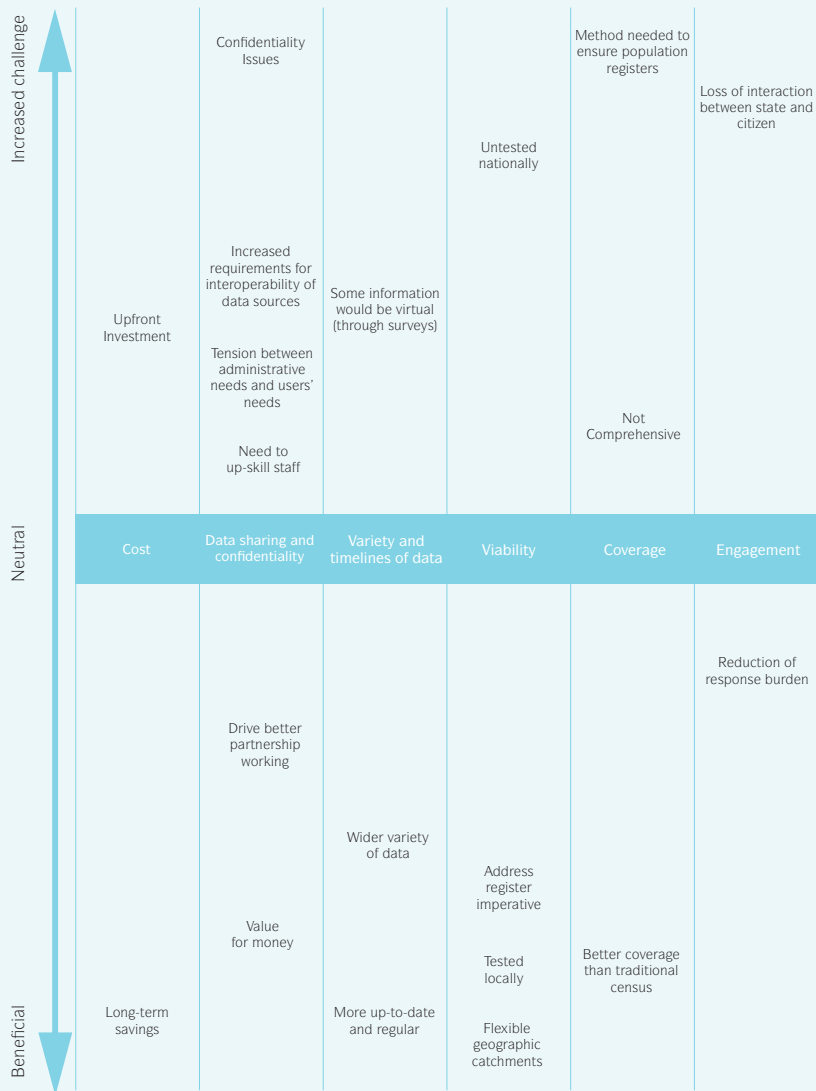
In Figure 2 below we set out the potential benefits and challenges associated with moving from a traditional census to a system based on administrative sources.

These are divided into six categories, which represent critical components and factors in population statistics:

- cost of the methodology,
- data sharing and confidentiality,
- variety and timeliness of data gathered,
- viability of the methodology,
- coverage across the population
- engagement with residents

81 These are developed from a range of sources, including: local population mapping evidence; ONS, *The 2011 Census: Initial View on content for England Wales* (May 2005); ONS, *Improving Migration and Population Statistics, 2007 Local Authority Case Studies: Final Report* (February 2008), p.12.

Figure 3: Benefits and challenges associated with moving to administrative sources



Surmounting the hurdles

Cost

Although a local database system would involve upfront investment it would lead to significant long-term savings. Cost has been a driving force in many other international cases. It has been projected that in the Netherlands, while a traditional census costs €300 million, the cost of the address register is €3 million – a saving of 99%.⁸² While this does not include the cost of setting up the register as it was already in existence, overwhelmingly the sources of data are available already. Therefore, it is a question of intelligent linkage. Even if the transformation was ten times as expensive in Britain as it was in the Netherlands, it would still render colossal savings. Equally, while the start up costs may be significant, if these were hypothecated against future years then the real savings can be understood.

Therefore, if the start-up costs were £1 billion and hypothecated over 50 years, and the system cost 10% of the traditional census to operate, then there would still be a savings of £250 million on the traditional census.

Data sharing and Confidentiality

Issues of privacy have been at the forefront of debates around data and statistics. There are widespread media fears of a ‘Big Brother’ state.⁸³ A survey of February 2008 found that 85% of respondents said that they worried more about the safety of their personal details than they used to. The national state has been the focus of a number of recent controversies surrounding misuse of data. A recent report from the Home Office Select Committee has advocated a policy of ‘data minimisation’, but has also recognised the desire of public and private agencies to gather more information to provide more personalised services.⁸⁴

It is worth noting that 62% of the population are happy to provide details to a company if it means they provide a better service.⁸⁵ The allocation

⁸² EN Economic and Social Council, *Census technology: recent developments and implications on census methodology: record matching for census purposes in the Netherlands* (March 2007).

⁸³ *Data Sharing Review*, p.28.

⁸⁴ Home Office Select Committee, *A Surveillance Society?* (June 2008), para 34,

⁸⁵ Henley Centre Headlight Vision, *Key trends affecting consumer rights* (presentation June 2008)

of encrypted Unique Property Reference Numbers and Unique Citizen Reference Numbers would ensure that this data when passed between agencies was not vulnerable to misuse.

If local authorities were the gatekeepers for population data, information would remain closer to the citizen and encrypted at the local level, fear of the Big Brother state could be minimised. Responsibilities would then rest on the Statistics Authority and the Information Commissioner to retain their neutrality and ensure that there was no abuse, whilst obligations would rest on local authorities to ensure probity.

As a recent report from the Information Commissioner suggests, 'organisations that can share information between themselves should be able to provide better, cheaper, faster and more personalised services to the public.' It concluded that the central issues around sharing data were proportionality, high levels of accountability and transparency from participating organisations.⁸⁶ Under the Statistics and Registration Act 2007, data sharing can only be done if it is in the public interest.

Significant challenges relate to matching individual identities between multiple data sources, harmonising definitions and classifications between the different types of register and achieving temporal consistency between sources and issues of differing scope and content. At present, the European Data Directive, the Data Protection Act 1998, the Human Rights Act 1998 and various Representations of the People legislation (for electoral registers) all proscribe parameters within which data can be collected and shared. Moreover, as Richard Thomas concluded, although the law itself may not provide a barrier, 'the complexity of the law, amplified by a plethora of guidance, leaves those who may wish to share data in a fog of confusion'.⁸⁷

Therefore both data-sharing law and government guidance would need to be examined in detail to facilitate the necessary sharing of data at a local and national level.

There are also potential tensions between the operational and statistical requirements of the agencies involved.⁸⁸ The provider-customer relationship

⁸⁶ Richard Thomas and Mark Walport, *Data Sharing Review Report* (July 2008), pp. i-ii, 18.

⁸⁷ *Data Sharing Review*, i.

⁸⁸ David Martin, 'Last of the censuses?', p. 11

means that the voices of customers can be dominant.⁸⁹ However, if approached in a positive way, these can be harnessed to drive a thriving market. It should also be noted that this provides a natural driver for the statistics to be relevant to current public policy needs – if they do not fulfil a function they will not be commissioned or purchased.

The Office of Public Sector Information is launching a project 'Public Sector Information Unlocking Service (beta)', which promises to enable those outside the public sector to make better use of public data that they are entitled to access.⁹⁰

Variety and timeliness of data

As the previous chapter demonstrates, by using administrative databases and customer intelligence, real-time data can be harnessed. Although some information could not be acquired directly (such as length of commute) as under a traditional census, this information can be acquired through surveys and developing smart cards and customer insight.

Viability

If the UK wished to move to an administrative database system, it would face the problem of possessing no master address list. However, any system to enumerate (rather than survey) the population relies on a robust and comprehensive address list. The Treasury Select Committee was shocked that no proper progress had been made on a reliable address register and expressed considerable surprise that local government had not made a business case for a full address register.

A major obstacle is the current 'tortuous dispute' between Ordnance Survey and the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG).⁹¹ As a 'trading fund', the Ordnance Survey has a 'revenue target' and thus must charge for the use of the information they develop. This has created a tension between the Ordnance Survey and the NLPG in the bid to create a comprehensive and accessible geo-referencing database.⁹² While it is the responsibility of central government to find a solution regarding the address register problem

⁸⁹ Statistics Commission, *The Nordic Contrast* (September 2007)

⁹⁰ <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/unlocking-service/OPSIpage.aspx?page=UnlockIndex>

⁹¹ Michael Cross, 'A Costly 2008 Doomsday Book', *Guardian*, 17 April 2008.

⁹² House of Commons *Counting the Population*, p.32, Ev 25.

involving the Post Office, Ordnance Survey and IDeA, it has suggested that it is not intending to take any further action over it ahead of 2011 census.⁹³

Experts have recommended legislation for a national address register.⁹⁴ If necessary, the status of Ordnance Survey as a 'trading fund' should be reformed and should revert to non-departmental public body status, so that it fulfils its public function of providing information for the good of the population.

The ongoing difficulties with Ordnance Survey indicate that ownership of rights to data can be a complex and obstructive dynamic in public services. It has been too easy in the past for one organisation to protect its own institutional interests in the face of the wider public good. These ransom strips must be brought back to serve the public good.

On the one hand, agencies – such as local authorities and the police – pay to gather the data and therefore there is no reason why they should not charge other agencies to share that data. On the other hand, cross-sector and national data is necessary, and the potential for obstruction from a recalcitrant organisation threatens to jeopardise the prospect of a homogenous and smoother system.

Therefore, not only should there be parameters for the types of data that local authorities and other organisations should gather, but there also must be reasonable reimbursement of these agencies for the costs incurred. In turn, this would provide greater investment in the refinement of data-collection techniques. There should also be a system by which the final value of population data is recycled to the front line from where it was developed.

Coverage

Research of the experience in the Netherlands reveals that administrative sources still suffer from differential under-recording of population sub-groups. However, coverage rates are much better than achieved under the last census.⁹⁵

Non-compliance from the general public should not be seen as a problem particular to moving to a database approach. Despite a hefty £1,000 fine,

93 Ev 207.

94 Ev 27-30.

95 David Martin, 'Last of the censuses?', p.12. [

the traditional census has failed to ensure full compliance. Meanwhile, although the overall response rate to the census has been calculated at 94%, in some areas the response rate was as low as 78%; of those who returned their forms, response rates to specific questions were as low as 83%.⁹⁶

Registration compliance can be encouraged in a number of ways:

- it can be made a legal requirement to register your address as in some other European countries;
- the electoral register currently carries legal compulsion and can be integrated;
- access to any public services – from health care to libraries – and benefits can be made requisite on the registration of address. This could be linked to a local entitlement card and/or the National Identity Register;
- to make themselves identifiable to credit ratings agencies, citizens are incentivised to enrol on the electoral register;
- it can be made a requirement on colleges and universities to provide address lists for their students in term-time.

Engagement

Local authorities should exploit existing systems for interacting with their local populations to understand specifically local needs.

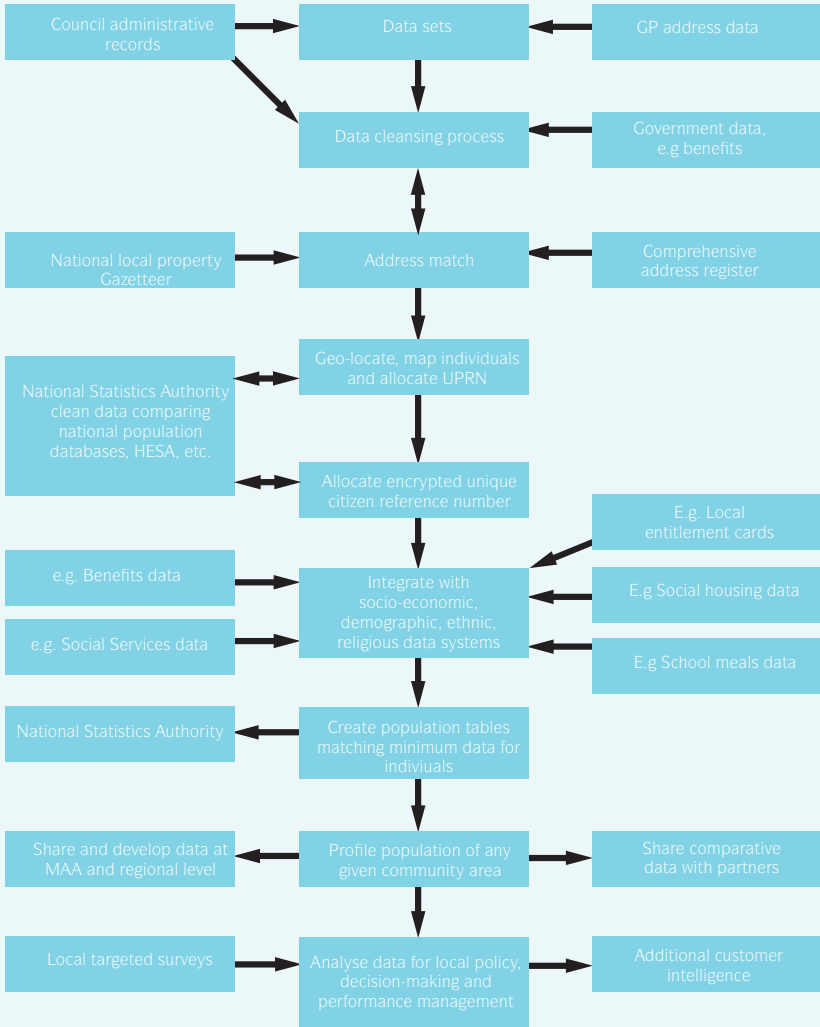
Since 2001, Electoral Registration Officers have updated the electoral register on a continuous basis.

Not only does the electoral register provide an excellent source of population information, but it also offers the potential to act as a mini information-gathering exercise.

Local authorities should also develop modern and inclusive lines of contact with their communities through online surveys, customer centres, focus groups, citizen juries and neighbourhood forums.

⁹⁶ Ludi Simpson, 'Are the census outputs fit for purpose?', (RSS, November 2003), p.3: www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/annexb.asp

Figure 4: NLGN's proposed alternative to census: Local administrative sources



7 Recommendations

No statistics system is ever going to capture 100% of the population. Any methodology will struggle to obtain information on individuals who do not wish to be noticed. The purpose should be to capture the maximum number of individuals, to provide relevant information and to retain the trust of users and the wider population.

Some local authorities are already acting ahead of the Government and, in some cases, this threatens to render national statistics less relevant. The expertise and models already exist. Local authorities have demonstrated that they can profile their populations more intricately and with greater accuracy than do the census methodologies.

By proceeding with a traditional census in 2011, the government risks drawing national and local data needs and systems further apart.

Recommendation 1

The Statistics Authority should seek to discontinue its traditional census methodology immediately and instead collect population data through administrative data sources in 2011.

Therefore, the Cabinet Office should:

- set up a new review including the LGA, statistical users and the new Statistics Authority focused on how this system can be introduced by 2011
- review data sharing responsibilities and frameworks in the light of the Treasury Select Committee report, the Thomas and Walport review and the recent 'Power of Information Review'
- establish a system for national address registration including legal compulsion and the linking of local and national benefits/services.

If it is too late to reform the existing traditional methodology for the 2011 census, councils should be able to bid to calculate their own populations in 2011 and be reimbursed by the Government.

Recommendation 2

In future, local authorities and other public bodies should be required by law to develop, in cooperation with public partners, a minimum set of population data for national statistical purposes. Figure 3 above sets out how the data gathering framework might look.

The administrative statistics should follow a broad and light national framework for required statistics and formats and should encourage discretion as to the collection of further population information. If councils cultivate data above and beyond this, they should be rewarded.

This framework would need to be robust so as to ensure consistency across the country and would need to be reinforced by an audit function.

A system of administrative data sources would create a genuine market for population data that would drive user-led and relevant statistics. Local authorities will be incentivised to ensure that the statistics are relevant and serviceable; the Government can make reasonable demands for its own purposes; the market for statistics at the end will ensure that population statistics are relevant to business users.

Recommendation 3

Traditional censuses are highly resource intensive. Even taking into account an upfront investment of £1 billion, £250 million could be saved per decade.

This money should be used to:

- resolve the issues of intellectual property rights which are impeding the creation of a comprehensive and accessible address register,
- give a grant of £1 million to each upper tier council in England and Wales (and a similar allocation to local authorities in Scotland and Northern Ireland) to promote better communication and understanding between the council and hard-to-reach, vulnerable and disengaged populations,
- create a pot to reward councils and partnerships that develop more sophisticated population profiling models.

Recommendation 4

Local authorities should exploit existing lines of engagement and develop new links with their citizens to extract additional information about their population and to build up trust. The electoral register should play a more focal part in the relationship between local state and individual: questions should feature to catch information on new and migrant populations.

Sample surveys, focus groups, citizenship panels and satisfaction surveys of place should be targeted to develop those pieces of information unavailable through database techniques.

Recommendation 5

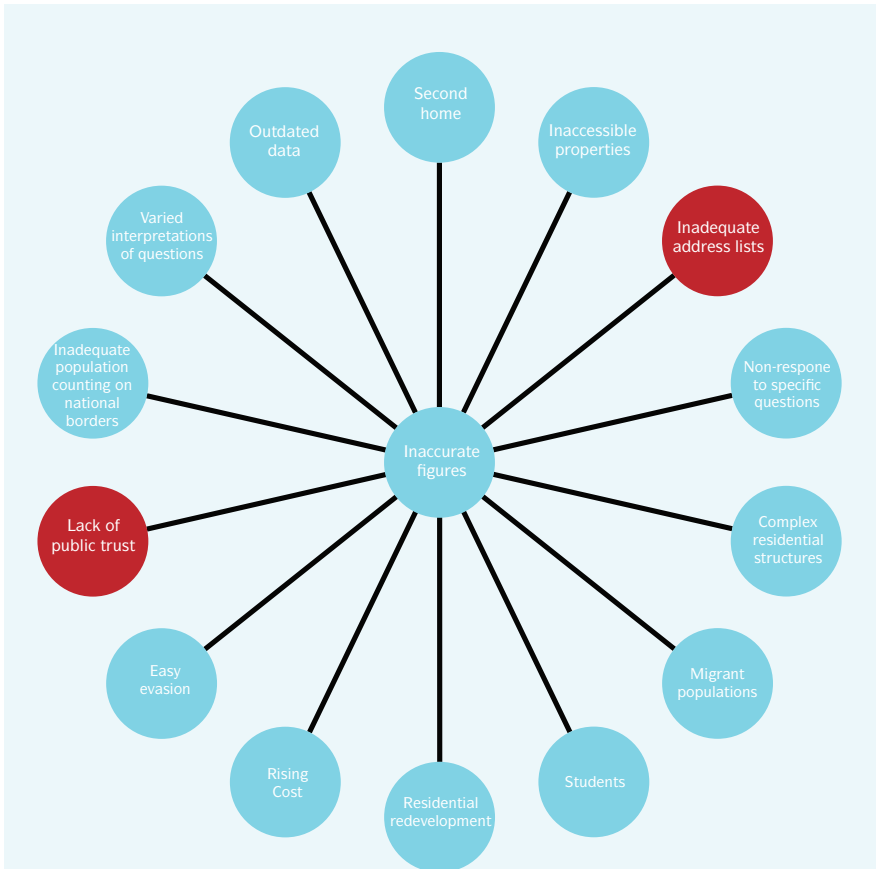
The frictions between Ordnance Survey and the National Land and Property Gazetteer should be resolved by legislation if necessary and / or amending the status of Ordnance Survey as a 'trading fund'. If necessary, the status of Ordnance Survey should revert to that of a non-departmental public body.

Recommendation 6

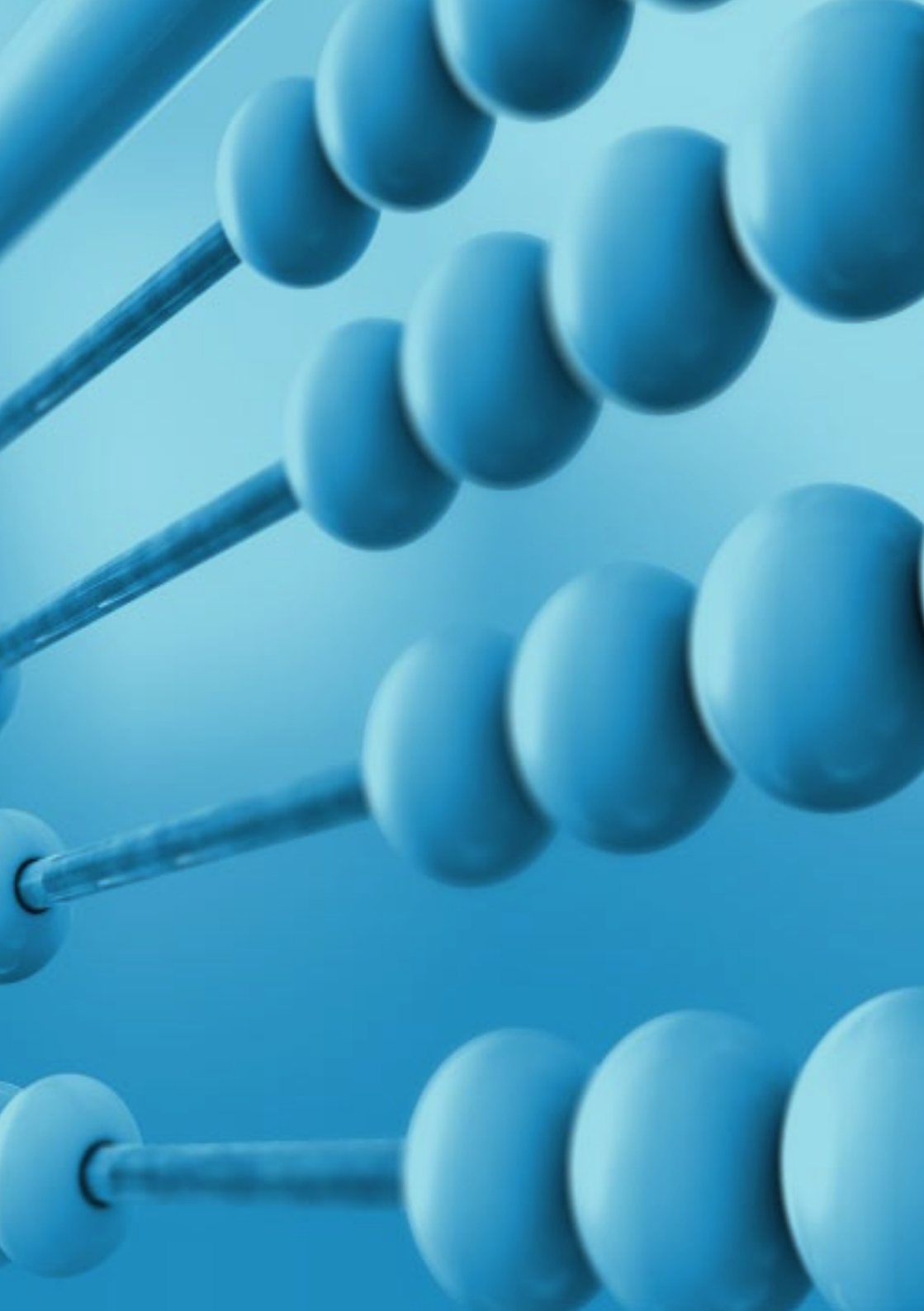
The Office for Public Sector Information, the Information Commissioner, the Cabinet Office, CLG and the LGA should lead an enquiry to investigate how this new system would impact on data sharing laws and what legislative reforms may be required. This should also give consideration to issues of privacy and a compulsory framework for trade in meta-data and encrypted and de-personalised data.

Appendix

Contributory problems for counting the population



Those dynamics marked blue could be resolved if administrative data sources were exploited intelligently. Those factors marked red would require other approaches such as a better understanding of data-protection, secure IT systems and privacy laws, closer partnership working and shared visions, and more open, transparent engagement of the public.



For the past two hundred years, a ten-yearly census has counted the population. In its time it was an innovative mechanism to understand population numbers and socio-economic factors. Just as the methods have changed so has the purpose. It is no longer innovative; it is no longer a robust mechanism. There are a whole range of new challenges facing the public sector in delivering services in the 21st century – from the requirement to understand the needs and expectations of public sector customers to the macro-economic distribution of taxation and grants.

So far the debate has centred on how the traditional census can be tinkered with or reformed to provide more accurately the information it has conventionally supplied. As yet, there has been little root and branch review. What is the purpose of the census? Does it still have a place in today's society? What is the data that is required? How can it be captured?

This paper takes a more fundamental position, asking – what exactly are the types of data needed at the local level? Only then does it go on to ask how this data can be acquired.