

London Borough of Southwark

Overview and Scrutiny

23 March 2009

Census 2011

Background

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for carrying out a national census every 10 years. The next census is scheduled to take place in 2011, with 27 March identified as the date to which the actual headcount will refer.

Local authorities have been requested by ONS to assist in ensuring that the census is conducted in a way that provides as accurate a result as possible. There are particular challenges in this regard for Southwark, as the previous census in 2001 resulted in a considerable undercount. The papers at pages 16 to 45 in the bundle of documents provide details of the undercount.

This document provides headline information in response to question 2 under the heading The Census on the second page of the scoping document, pages 1-3 of the bundle of documents.

ONS preparations

ONS has been preparing for the 2011 census for some time. In 2007 a number of pilots were held, including one in Camden. Kwabena Owusu-Agyameng of the Analytical Hub has prepared a short paper on what can be learned from the Camden experience. This is included in the bundle of documents at pages 6-9.

The census forms for the 2011 census will be posted to all residential properties, with follow-up for non-responding households. An accurate address list is therefore crucial. Southwark was one of 24 LAs which sent through their Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG) database to the ONS for checking against the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG) database.

There will be a final test during 2009 – three LAs are involved in this, one of which is Newham. It will obviously be important to keep abreast of developments in Newham during this process.

Significance of the census

The reason the census is of such critical importance is due to the fact that central government uses the population figures derived from the ONS census as the basis for calculating the financial settlement for local authorities.

It is also likely that the 2011 census will be last one conducted in the present format, with census forms sent out to households. In future it is likely that existing data sets will be used to calculate the population in any area. It would be extremely helpful to have an accurate census in 2011, as this could then act as the baseline for future calculations.

Scope of the census project

The project will commence from early 2009 and will continue until at least 2013. There are two main objectives for the project:

1. The successful completion of the census, in a way which ensures that all residents within the borough are counted
2. The design of an effective strategy for the post-census period, enabling Southwark to either challenge the results of the census, or effectively impact on any revision of the census results, in order to ensure that the population figure ascribed to the borough accurately reflects the number of people in the borough

The second objective is crucial, as it is universally accepted that certain areas in the UK will be under-counted. It is likely that considerable parts of Southwark will fall within these areas.

It will also be necessary to identify allies and champions to assist in the negotiations and discussions which are expected to take place throughout the census period. These issues are addressed more fully in the IMPS paper, pages 10-15 in the bundle of documents, where similar strategies are discussed with reference to the present situation.

Responsible officers

The ONS has requested that the LA appoint two officers to perform specific functions. Duncan Whitfield is the census liaison manager (executive) and Fran Biggs is the assistant census liaison manager (operational).

There will be a team of officers who will be asked to undertake specific responsibilities for the identified work areas.

The first meeting of the census team is scheduled to take place on 14 April, and officers will then be given specific areas of responsibility.

Work areas

The attached paper on preparations for 2011 census by Ian Farrow provides details of the main work areas which have been identified to date.

Each of these work areas will be expanded upon, with work programmes attached, to ensure that deliverables are identified and objectives met.

The key issues are as follows:

- There must be a maximised return of correctly completed census forms – through the use of an accurate address database, involvement of community groups and the use of local publicity
- There must be a shared understanding of the population that is not counted, and appropriate strategies developed to mitigate any undercount – this will be necessary both during and after the census
- Specific circumstances relevant to Southwark must be identified, such as the possible impact of regeneration schemes
- Resource implications need to be identified

- Implications for partners need to be identified, and strategies devised for collaboration wherever possible

Next steps

- Convene initial meeting of census team, and monthly meetings thereafter
- Identify core work areas
- Allocate work areas to specified individuals and teams, with lead responsibility
- Devise timeline for main activities

Fran Biggs
Assistant Census Liaison Manager
March 2009