



SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE C

MINUTES of the Scrutiny Sub-Committee C held on Tuesday May 12 2009 at 7.00 pm
at Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5 8UB

PRESENT: Councillor Toby Eckersley (Chair)
Councillor Anood Al-Samerai
Councillor Dora Dixon-Fyle
Councillor Richard Livingstone
Councillor Jane Salmon
Councillor Mackie Sheik

OFFICER SUPPORT: Fran Biggs, Electoral Services & Local Land Charges Manager
Ian Cope – ONS Census Deputy Director
Dan Gilby, Corporate Policy Officer
Kwabena Owusu-Agyemang, Manager Analytical Hub
Glen Watson – ONS Census Director
Duncan Whitfield, Finance Director
Sally Masson, Scrutiny Project Manager

1. APOLOGIES

1.1 There were none.

2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT

2.1 There were none.

3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS

3.1 There were none.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on March 23 2009 be agreed as a correct record with the correction that Councillor Anood Al-Samerai (Vice

Chair) was present.

5. STRENGTHENING THE CENSUS WORK FOR THE 2011 COUNT

- 5.1 The Chair opened the meeting by thanking Glen Watson and Ian Cope from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) for attending the meeting.
- 5.2 The officers from ONS began by saying that they attached a lot of importance to the Southwark Census counting process and that they were pleased that they had been invited to come and talk with the sub-committee about it.
- 5.3 The officers presented the work they had been doing to date for the 2011 Census count for England and Wales. (See Appendix 1)
- 5.4 The presentation covered the background to and lessons learned from previous Census counts which took into consideration the changes now taking place in Southwark's communities. The presentation also looked at the proposals for a review of the procedures for 2011 which included the various adjustments necessary and improved stakeholder engagement.
- 5.5 Officers told the sub-committee that the primary purpose of a Census is to get as clearer picture as possible of our communities to ensure we have the proper level of funding for the PCTs and local authorities. It also allows government and the associated businesses to plan their investments and plan decision making on appropriate training requirements. Officers highlighted the importance of counting ethnic groups as accurately as possible because this monitors the success of equal opportunities schemes and ensures that resources are appropriately allocated.
- 5.6 The logistics of coordinating such an operation is very complex. There are 24 million households in England and Wales with 70,000 field staff needed to make 2.6 million calls.
- 5.7 There have been problems in a few local authority areas. Despite the 94% response rate, (forms returned) some areas have fallen below 70%. There has been, up to now, no central form tracking system with pockets of poor enumeration going undetected. Also there have been problems recruiting and retaining field staff with payments subject to difficulties because of problems with the payroll system.
- 5.8 Nowadays it is increasingly the case that there are more people living alone and there are more single parents with a child or children who live part time with each parent. This 'transient' arrangement makes it harder to track and count people.
- 5.9 The challenges for Southwark is that there is increasing mobility and migration with 25% of people aged over 85 by 2011. The complexity of family structures and living arrangements further complicate the picture. It can be problematic gaining access to controlled buildings (those with security doors) in multiple occupancy dwellings.

- 5.10 The changes that have taken place since 2001 have included: Checking addresses before the Census day along with the systems that support the post out and post back (sending out and returning questionnaires). There is now an on-line facility to make returns and there is also a questionnaire tracking system in place to show up areas of non-response enabling subsequent follow up on those who do not respond.
- 5.11 The officers from ONS acknowledged that in Southwark there was a low response rate in 2001 with the highest number of unprocessed forms in the country. There had been insufficient 'dummy' forms (which should help to predict numbers) created by enumerators which meant that the coverage of the borough had to be adjusted to add 66,808 people. In the 2004 study, 6,522 had been added.
- 5.12 Members were surprised to learn that Dulwich seemed to have quite a low level of returns. It was thought that these kinds of anomalies could be addressed with more effort to engage with the Southwark communities.
- 5.13 In 2005, ONS started to consult with local authorities. There was a £150 million for a new processing contract to begin. In March 2009 the census rehearsal began and the recruitment of field staff was undertaken with Capita. In October the final rehearsal is scheduled to start with test boroughs, Lancaster, Anglesey and Newham. The Census field operation consists of 20 – 30 regional managers, 120 area managers, 1,800 Census Coordinators, 25,000 Collectors. There will also be address checkers, hand delivery staff, special enumerators and specialist staff working on non compliance.
- 5.14 The 'targeted follow' up will include the improved allocation of field staff - based on the estimated initial response rates. The data which was used were from the Department of Work and Pensions and income support statistics. Field staff have been allocated a Census coordinator which should increase the response rate and assist in minimising the variability in staff workloads. This enable more scope to use the teams more flexibly when spending time on follow up work.
- 5.15 The census forms are in a variety of languages which vary according to the individual needs of the communities within the borough. It was highlighted by Members that forms should include versions in Vietnamese for the borough of Southwark.
- 5.16 Questions on the forms are usually around the following topics:
- Basic demographic questions
 - housing
 - identity (ethnicity, national identity, language, religion)
 - migration
 - health/caring
 - qualifications
 - occupation and employment

New questions about migration, citizenship, second residences, languages and national identity, have now been added.

- 5.17 2009 is the year for the rehearsal. There should be fully integrated rehearsals of field operations including the supporting systems such as data capture and coding which underpin the work. There will be testing of the quantity and quality of the estimated initial response rates and an evaluation of how well all aspects of the system performed.
- 5.18 The process will take a selection of random post codes which will be followed up by a doorstep exercise to ascertain how well the questions have been understood.
- 5.19 The coverage and adjustment process deals with the imputation of households along with an approximation as to how many persons have been missed. It also uses the CCS to characterise the households and persons missed; these add up to the census estimates at Local Authority level.
- 5.20 The census business case will be on the ONS website in the next month. Their target is to maintain a 94% response rate; whilst attempting to do better in the worst performing areas. It was acknowledged that the total population estimate is only as good as the information inputted into the system in the first place.
- 5.21 Members wanted to know if there was a mechanism to calculate and record the non returns, refusals and/or invalid addresses. ONS Officers said that more was being done to improve the overall picture of data collected. There will also be data collected from GPs surgeries and the Local Authorities Local Land and Property Gazetteer.
- 5.22 It was felt that Local Authorities could assist with providing more accurate data. That their data sets are kept up to date as much as possible. Local Authorities could also help by identifying HMO's and multiple occupational dwellings and, if possible, assist with information on properties where there is possible subletting.
- 5.23 There is effort being undertaken by ONS to ensure there is more stakeholder engagement with the increased utilisation of data from local authorities and community partners. Integral to this is the intention of ONS to assure participants that the information provided on the Census forms is not being used for any other purpose but for the Census count. It was confirmed that the field staff do, as a matter of course, make this plain at the doorstep.
- 5.24 There are continued efforts to include new builds on the relevant ONS data bases. However, it was felt that perhaps Councillors could assist ONS with providing local knowledge of their areas to minimise any mistakes during the pilot scheme. This would also assist ONS with identifying any problem areas where field staff may be at risk.
- 5.25 The role of the Census Liaison Manager is responsible for accessing the decision makers and championing Census work within the Local Authority. It is also their responsibility to provide guidance information to ONS. The Assistant Census Liaison Manager will be responsible at a more operational working level, providing the day to day communication between the Local Authority and ONS. Local Authorities could provide assistance with ensuring the publicity of Census work is in the local media and displayed in public spaces usually used by the Council.

- 5.26 The input of information provided by Local Authorities will add to the enumeration intelligence which will hopefully reduce the under-coverage problems and help to target field resources where response rates are expected to be low.
- 5.27 ONS expect Southwark to assist with the Census work by:
- Providing an accurate address register
 - Contributing to the LA Communications Advisory Group and publicising key census messages.
 - Providing knowledge of our community
 - Providing data from Council Tax and Electoral Registration and
 - Ensuring that our Local Land and Property Gazetteer is up to date.
- 5.28 In response to Members questions, Officers from ONS said that Census forms will be delivered by hand to prisons and care homes. It is now also possible to fill in a return via an online completion method.
- 5.29 Members were concerned that there will be a good standard of quality control. Diagrams of the area where there are poor returns could assist with the coverage of the operation. At present there is some confusion over which areas in Southwark are under returning. Dulwich and Lyndurst seemed to be areas where Councillors would expect a higher return but the opposite is shown in ONS figures.
- 5.30 Members felt that those sitting on 'expert panels' should not be seen to have a vested interest in the process. Integrity and objectivity should be maintained throughout.
- 5.31 Members expressed considerable concern that Southwark's figures are not a true representation of the population and therefore in danger of not receiving the proper amount of funding. Southwark were deprived of funding because of the inadequate Census data collected in 2001. ONS Officers acknowledged that the key objectives this time were to maximise the returns and felt that there was a need for the 76.8% returns to grow by an extra 3%. Members were unhappy that the aim was only for a 3% increase and felt that ONS should be aspiring for a much higher level of return.
- 5.32 Members were concerned about how we can identify hidden communities and hard to reach individuals. There are concerns about the current strategy and its effectiveness. It was agreed that stronger working between all parties is the way forward especially in regard to ensuring there are clear lines of communication between all and a willingness to share information and data.
- 5.33 It was acknowledged that the DCLG were not listening to ONS regarding their out of date ONS estimates. This situation needed to be improved to find the gaps in data and the possible impact of non returns.

RESOLVED: Members agreed that a set of recommendations would go to the Southwark Executive and further recommendations would be added for setting up mechanisms to enable effective joint working between the Executive and the ONS.

6. POPULATION CHURN

- 6.1 The Chair thanked Dan Gilby for drafting the initial Population Churn report. The Chair felt that the bullet points entitled 'next steps' would be a good basis on which to form recommendations to the Executive.
- 6.2 Dan Gilby reported that there has not been a great deal of work on population churn in Southwark and it would be beneficial to revisit this subject once further work has been carried out.
- 6.3 The issue of population churn links in with lobbying activities and funding allocations however, as yet we, as a Local Authority don't fully understand the churn within the local population and how we provide services to our diverse communities. Building a better understanding of population churn in the borough would allow use to make better use of existing resources by using this understanding to inform service design and delivery and predict future population churn.
- 6.4 The potential around the current data sources and how we utilise that data is yet to be fully explored. There are qualities issues around how we use information and data collected to inform our service provision. The quality of the data could be improved with more engagement with local communities.
- 6.5 The Southwark Alliance has submitted a bid to the Migration Impacts Fund, consisting of nine projects across a range of Council services, which are designed to assist local partners in dealing with the impact of migration on existing services and settled communities. The bid totalled £682,043 and a response from the Department for Communities and Local Government on the outcome of the bid is expected on 15 June.
- 6.6 It was stressed that Southwark needs clear and accurate information from all the departments operating in Southwark and that wherever possible, the Census work should be promoted at all levels within Council departments.

RESOLVED: Members agreed that the bullet points entitled 'next steps' would be developed as recommendations to the Executive.

Questions

- 6.7 The sub-committee and ONS Officers discussed further questions.
- 6.7 **Question 1:** White paper: Forms will primarily be delivered by post (to as many as 95 per cent of households). Forms will also be posted back to a central location. What happens to the remaining 5% of places?

- 6.8 **Answer:** The rest will be delivered by hand. This is to address any mismatches in the system and promote more effective engagement. The rehearsal should test the robustness of the systems, in particular the 'post back' exercise.
- 6.9 **Question:** What is fallback position if something goes wrong with post out / back mechanism?
- 6.10 **Answer:** There is currently no 'post out' fall back however, the address register will say a lot about the quality of the procedures. It is acknowledged that a significant amount will be missed however. The doorstep operation will help to spot patterns that may assist with the coverage of the survey. The public will be encouraged to make contact with ONS through the ONS and Southwark Council's contact centers. There will not be extra provision for Southwark to take calls regarding the Census but all queries should be easy to answer for the Southwark contact centre and if they are not, people will be directed to the ONS contact centre.
- 6.11 **Question:** A labour force of some 30,000 temporary field staff will be employed to carry out the Census. This is a big reduction to the number of enumerators employed for the 2001 census (75,000). How exactly will the field force be distributed to low response areas?
- 6.12 **Answer:** There has been more effort to ensure that there is good training in the skills that are needed to carry out the work effectively. Enumerators in the past were expected to be jack of all trades and as a consequence, their overall abilities were compromised. Now enumerators will have their duties more clearly defined and will receive training in their area of expertise. It was not clear how many enumerators will be employed by Southwark at this stage. It was acknowledged that ONS have Southwark down as one of the top 10 hardest boroughs in which to conduct a successful Census count.
- 6.13 **Question:**
- Will there be sufficient training and capacity to deal with the volume of calls you are likely to get from areas such as Southwark?
 - Will additional resources be made available for hard to reach areas with specific information and training made available to contact centre employees?
- 6.14 **Answer:** ONS have put together simple FAQs for use on Councils websites. These questions usually cover all bases but if there is a more specific query ONS advise local authorities to put them in touch with ONS directly. Members commented that Vangent, the subcontractor for certain work

carried out for and on behalf of the Council would have to be informed that they would be expected to undertake this extra responsibility. There will be no extra funding from ONS to Southwark for this.

- 6.15 **Question:** Although the council can see the benefits of using new technology in order to manage scarce resources more efficiently during 2011 census we are concerned that too much reliance is being placed on the OI system. What risk analysis and alternative provision has been made around the potential for OI failure?
- 6.16 Has this new technology been thoroughly tested in census conditions and how?
- 6.17 **Answer:** If there are problems with the post back system, the new OI (Questionnaire tracking) system should assist with clarifying what it is ONS are expecting back. ONS officers are confident that this system is very robust with each questionnaire having a bar code with which to identify it. The contract has been awarded to Royal Mail for the post back service.
- 6.18 **Question:** Is 25% response online too optimistic? How do you come by these figures and what is the strategy for dealing with areas like Southwark where this response will be much lower?
- 6.19 **Answer:** There is now an online facility which should increase the amount of responses. There is now a 'belt and braces' approach to ensuring as many returns as possible. It is thought that with publicity numbers will significantly rise.
- 6.20 **Question:** Will local authorities receive any extra resource to fund the management of the census process and a local publicity and stakeholder engagement campaign?
- 6.21 **Answer:** There will be no extra funding, provided by ONS to resource the management of the process. ONS have not received any extra money from the treasury so this Census is operating on an act of good will, looking to utilise money already received.
- 6.22 ONS/Southwark need to look at publicity locally. Southwark to look at the promotion of the Census work within community groups, newsletters and the existing communication channels.
- 6.23 The Chair and sub-committee thanked all involved for the work that had been undertaken this year.

The meeting concluded at 10pm.