



CENSUS ADVISORY GROUP

AG (03) 09

SUPER OUTPUT AREAS: UPDATE

Introduction

- 1 Paper AG(03)02 sought the views of Advisory Group Members on the proposals for a new layered geography for Neighbourhood Statistics, the smallest zones of which would be will be the 2001 Census Output Area, and the largest would be local authority districts. These layers have the working title *Super Output Areas* and would form a core geography for the collection and output of Neighbourhood Statistics. They would be durable and frozen, at least in the short term in order to provide a consistent geography for readily measuring change.
- 2 The consultation paper, which had been circulated widely to both Census and NeSS users, also reported that a feasibility study with real Census data was underway to test out the leading proposal, and invited comments by the end of April.

Action

- 3 **Advisory Group members are invited to note the response to the consultation and comment.**

Consultation – feedback

- 4 About 55 responses have been received; about 40 were from local authorities (including about 10 from county councils or joint bodies). Many of the other 15 or so came from academic bodies, commercial or business bodies and central government departments. The responses are being summarised. This paper provides only a cursory overview.
- 5 The proposal was welcomed by many users. Some, however, queried the number of layers, and some feared complexity; others firmly supported the idea of three layers. The opportunities for local agencies to modify the middle layer and suggest the upper layer were also welcomed. Some users asked for consultation over the lower layer also.

- 6 Views on relationship with wards at the outset were very varied. Any link above the Census OA level was regarded as unnecessary (even for the lower layer) by several academic and commercial bodies. Many local authorities requested a link for the lower layer, and some a link for the middle layer. They cited easier continuity for existing series based on wards and ease of transition generally.
- 7 Several districts, where boundary reviews are underway, preferred middle layer SOAs to be free of a constraint to wards. The need for Census Standard Tables was mentioned by several who supported a link for the lower layer only.

Feasibility Study

- 8 Zone design software used for designing the Census output geography gave great emphasis to grouping postcodes such that many OAs had similar numbers of households.
- 9 In a scheme for a layer of zones, most of which will lie between one and two times the minimum size, the emphasis on a target size is not appropriate (for the Census, areas were typically several times larger than the minimum size). We are still adapting software to reduce this emphasis on ‘target’ size by allowing, for example, a wider range of size within a layer, and moving away from having an average size that is uniform across all districts. This would allow variation in number of zones in similar sized districts/wards, according to the disposition of data on proximity, for example.
- 10 Work on connectedness has had a slow start. We are unsure as to whether it can be included in manner proposed in the time available. We are trying to assess the interaction between the work on connectedness and the overall timetable.

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