ONS engagement with Privacy groups re smart meter data research

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Context

Given the privacy concerns around the use of personal data for ONS intended research within the ONS Big Data project, ONS held meetings with two privacy groups to gain their input.

The privacy groups were:

Government Digital Service (GDS) Privacy and Consumer Advisory Group

Meeting held on 3 June 2014

Attendees: ███████████ (GDS), ███████████ (GDS), ███████████ (Enterprise Privacy Group), ███████████ (Information Commissioner's Office), ███████████ (Amberhawk), █████████ (Oxford Internet Institute), ███████████ (British Computer Society), ███████████ (Centre for Technology Policy Research and chair); Jane Naylor (ONS) and Susan Williams (ONS)

The group were introduced to the plans for four pilot research projects involving: mobile phone data (for commuting flows); twitter data (for mobility) and smart meter data (for occupancy modelling).
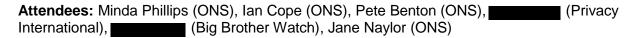
Notes from meeting:

- Overall positive about what we are planning and that we were engaging at an early stage
- Useful to demonstrate benefit of what we are doing by showing how by using a big data source we might produce an output much faster than by using a traditional survey approach
- Anonymous data can be de-anonymised (for example NHS data on episodes?)
- Need to emphasise aggregate data - and explain what this means - particularly for mobile phone pilot, have clear and simple lines to take. Test them with public/lay person. Content with us to progress pilot work on mobile phone data - provided it is aggregate
- Need to be clear that data sets are not combined and are stored securely and separately
- Public will be concerned about commercial companies (eg mobile phone operators) making money from their data - we give them our data, they then make money from it?
- People aren't aware they have given permission for their data to be used. Why not ask the mobile phone providers what they have done to inform their customers about how their data is used
- Should we consider a Privacy Impact Assessment?
- On Twitter pilot - need to be aware that by publicising the work you may influence behaviour eg people will turn geo-location off
- Will our codes of conduct/practise keep up with innovation, are they flexible enough?
- Need to be as open and transparent as possible about what you need the data for - this will be at odds with big data analytical approach which is to 'play' with the data and see what comes from it
- Need for an ONS Ethical Committee? (was discussed at Coordination Group on 2 June)
- Group thought that the obvious question from the public would be how much of Census would be replaced by Big Data - a "scary" prospect for the public

- Latest quarterly summary report will be sent to the group for more detailed comment. They were keen to be engaged as the project progresses. They meet monthly or we can engage via correspondence. Once we have a draft policy I think it would be useful to share it with this group.
- Individuals agreed to send me any links/references to previous work that they thought would be useful to us

ONS Beyond 2011 Privacy Advisory Group.

Meeting held on 3 June 2014

Attendees: Minda Phillips (ONS), Ian Cope (ONS), Pete Benton (ONS), ▆▆▆▆▆▆ (Privacy International), ▆▆▆▆▆ (Big Brother Watch), Jane Naylor (ONS)

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Notes on Smartmeter pilot:

- Happy for ONS to undertake pilot to understand value of the data but raised some serious privacy issues if it went beyond research
- ▆▆▆▆ said she would need to be convinced of a 'pressing need' to use this data operationally
- Concerns seem to stem from confidence in the ability to store/process/anonymise the data
- Some research has shown that one can derive the make of your fridge from this data! - need to look at ▆▆▆▆▆▆▆ research here, also mentioned by GDS group