

RESPONDENT: 2972543113 – Gillian Smith
SECTOR: Unknown - Individual

Q1 - What are your views of the different census approaches described in the consultation document?

I endorse the response from the social research association. I have significant misgivings about the reliance on administrative data and argue strongly that there is a current and likely policy need for data on very small geographical areas.

Q2 - Please specify any significant uses of population and housing statistics that we have not already identified.

Decisions on the future of the census should give sufficient weight to likely long term data needs and should avoid making decisions based on the data that is needed at this particular point in history. I acknowledge that this poses challenges, but there is particular concern about the assumptions being made, albeit implicitly, about the (lack of) need for small area data in national level policy making.

Q3 - Please specify any significant additional benefits of population and housing statistics that we have not already identified.

see above - the consultation document is grounded in analysis of current needs. Little effort seems to have been devoted to assessing future needs. It seems inevitable that a future national level government will at some point become concerned about (widening) inequality between different neighbourhoods and the nature of disadvantage suffered. The kinds of questions likely to be posed include, for example: how wide is the gap between rich and poor areas? is there a clustering or dispersion of deprived areas? is there a tipping point at which areas go into a spiral of decline? Answering these and other questions will require an accurate picture of multiple deprivation at the small area level for the whole country, using a common measurement yardstick.

Q4 - What would the impact be if the most detailed statistics for very small geographic areas and small population groups were no longer available? High, medium, low or no impact?

High

If medium or high, please give further information.

This information is needed by local areas many of whom are hidden and won't respond to the consultation. See SRA response on this point. It also seems inevitable that a future national level government will at some point become concerned about (widening) inequality between different neighbourhoods and the nature of disadvantage suffered. The kinds of questions likely to be posed include, for example: how wide is the gap between rich and poor areas? is there a clustering or dispersion of deprived areas? is there a tipping point at which areas go into a spiral of decline? Answering these and other questions will require an accurate picture of multiple deprivation at the small area level for the whole country, using a common measurement yardstick. A critical challenge in constructing an reliable picture is the need for accurate population denominators for small areas. We do not see how this could be done in a sufficiently robust way without the census. Even though denominators would need to be updated between censuses the census provides a critical 10 year check to ensure that population estimates are not becoming inaccurate. I recognize that it may well be that some local areas are capable of constructing their own denominators using local knowledge, but a key point is that it would not be possible to construct a national or even regional picture of the situation across different small areas using locally generated knowledge. I am aware of on-going work on options for updating the indices of multiple deprivation but we feel that ONS need to give sufficient weight to the overall point made above that such data is very likely to become far more important in underpinning policy decisions, including decisions on the targeting of public expenditure.

Q5 - What would the additional benefit be if more frequent (i.e. annual) statistics about population characteristics were available for areas like local authorities and electoral wards? High, medium, low or no additional benefit?

Medium

If medium or high please give further information.

Q6 - Please specify any significant uses of census information for historical research that we have not already identified.

I am a family historian in my spare time. The really critical benefit of census data is it contains information on the household and relationships within the household i.e. the relationship of everyone listed to the head of household. This is invaluable in working out who people are. Administrative data based on individuals - even individuals living at the same address would not provide the necessary information as the critical thing is to understand the relationship to head of household which the census provides.

Q7 - What advantages or disadvantages for genealogical or historical research can you see from a move to a solution based on archiving administrative data sources?

see above

Q8 - What are your views of the risks of each census approach and how they might be managed?

see sra response

Q9 - Are there any other issues that you believe we should be taking into account?