



House of Commons
Treasury Committee

Counting the population

Eleventh Report of Session 2007–08

Volume I



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Report, together with formal minutes, oral and written evidence

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The Treasury Committee

The Treasury Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of HM Treasury, HM Revenue & Customs and associated public bodies.

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The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at www.parliament.uk/treascom.

A list of Reports of the Committee in the current Parliament is at the back of this volume.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Colin Lee (Clerk), Sïan Jones (Second Clerk and Clerk of the Sub-Committee), Adam Wales, Jon Young and Jay Sheth (Committee Specialists), Phil Jones (Committee Assistant), Caroline McElwee (Secretary), Tes Stranger (Senior Office Clerk) and Laura Humble (Media Officer).

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Contents

Report	<i>Page</i>
Summary	3
1 Introduction	5
The purpose of our inquiry	5
Conduct of the inquiry	5
The Statistics Authority, the Treasury and the Cabinet Office	5
2 How the population is counted	8
What is being counted and how it is counted	8
The role of the Census	8
Overview	8
History of censuses	9
Census data	10
Methods used	10
The frequency and importance of Censuses	11
The 2001 Census and the 2011 Census	12
Mid-year population estimates	13
Overview	13
Generating the mid-year population estimates	13
Mid-year population estimates methodology	14
Data used in the mid-year estimates	14
Births and deaths	14
Measuring migration	15
International migration data	15
International Passenger Survey	16
Internal migration data	16
Current role of administrative data	17
National Insurance registers	17
Pupil and student information	18
Migrant registration	18
Meeting the needs of the user	19
3 Why accurate population statistics matter	20
Uses of population statistics	20
Implications for economic uses	20
Local Authorities	21
4 Difficulties in counting the population	22
Problems with the 2001 Census	22
Accuracy of the mid-year population estimates	23
Counting a migrating population	24
Estimating international migration	25
Estimating internal migration between Local Authorities	26
Short-term migration	27

5	Preparing for the 2011 Census	31
	Census preparation	31
	Length of census questionnaire	31
	Address register	32
	Census funding and value for money	33
	Census delivery contract	34
6	Improving current statistics	36
	Recognising the need for change	36
	Inter-Departmental Task Force on Migration Statistics	36
	Estimating internal migration	37
	Local Authority information	38
	Improving uses of administrative and survey data	38
	E-Borders programme	39
7	Beyond 2011	41
	Population registers	41
	The international use of population registers	43
	NHS registers	44
	The future of the Census	45
	Conclusions and recommendations	47
	Witnesses	52
	List of written evidence	52
	List of Reports from the Treasury Committee during the current Parliament	53

Summary

Counting a highly mobile population

We consider the problems faced by some Local Authorities in estimating their highly mobile populations. We note that there were substantial problems in generating accurate population estimates in some areas during the 2001 Census. We also consider the methods used to estimate local populations between each census and conclude that such estimates (mid-year population estimates) are not fit for purpose as they fail to properly account for internal migration. We raise concerns that the allocation of funding to Local Authorities could be based on inadequate information. We recommend that the new Statistics Authority establish as an immediate priority the provision of local population statistics that more accurately reflect the full range of information available about local populations and the effects of internal migration.

Short-term migration and the International Passenger Survey

We discuss the usefulness of the mid-year population estimates, based on the 'usually resident' population. We highlight that such estimates do not include short-term migrants, and do not fully meet the needs of Local Authorities and commercial users. We call on the Statistics Authority to investigate the feasibility of producing population estimates based on different measures of population, such as estimates which include short-term migrants and estimates which include the day-time population of Local Authorities. We raise concern about use of the International Passenger Survey in estimating international migration. We conclude that the Survey is not fit for this new purpose and recommend that the Statistics Authority replace the International Passenger Survey with a new Survey that is more comprehensive and more suited to the accurate measurement of international movements affecting the size of the resident population of the United Kingdom.

Administrative data

We note that the development of computerised administrative records in the UK has moved on rapidly in recent years and the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 has established conditions under which such information could be used for statistical purposes. We recommend that the Government work with the Statistics Authority to ensure that strong ethical safeguards are put in place to protect the personal information held by Government departments. We also call on the Statistics Authority to set out the action that the Authority will take to develop the Government's administrative databases to provide a more accurate and cost effective method of monitoring the population.

National address register

We note that the accuracy of the 2011 Census is dependent on the production of a national address register. We raise concern that no progress has been made to develop such a register. We recommend that the Government consult the Statistics Authority and others to remove any outstanding obstacles to the production of a national address register.

The future of the Census

We assess the current challenges facing the Statistics Authority in conducting the 2011 Census and conclude that the traditional census has almost had its day. We recommend that the Statistics Authority set strategic objectives to ensure that the data currently gathered throughout the UK can be used to produce annual population statistics that are of a quality that will enable the 2011 Census to be the last census in the UK where the population is counted through the collection of census forms.

